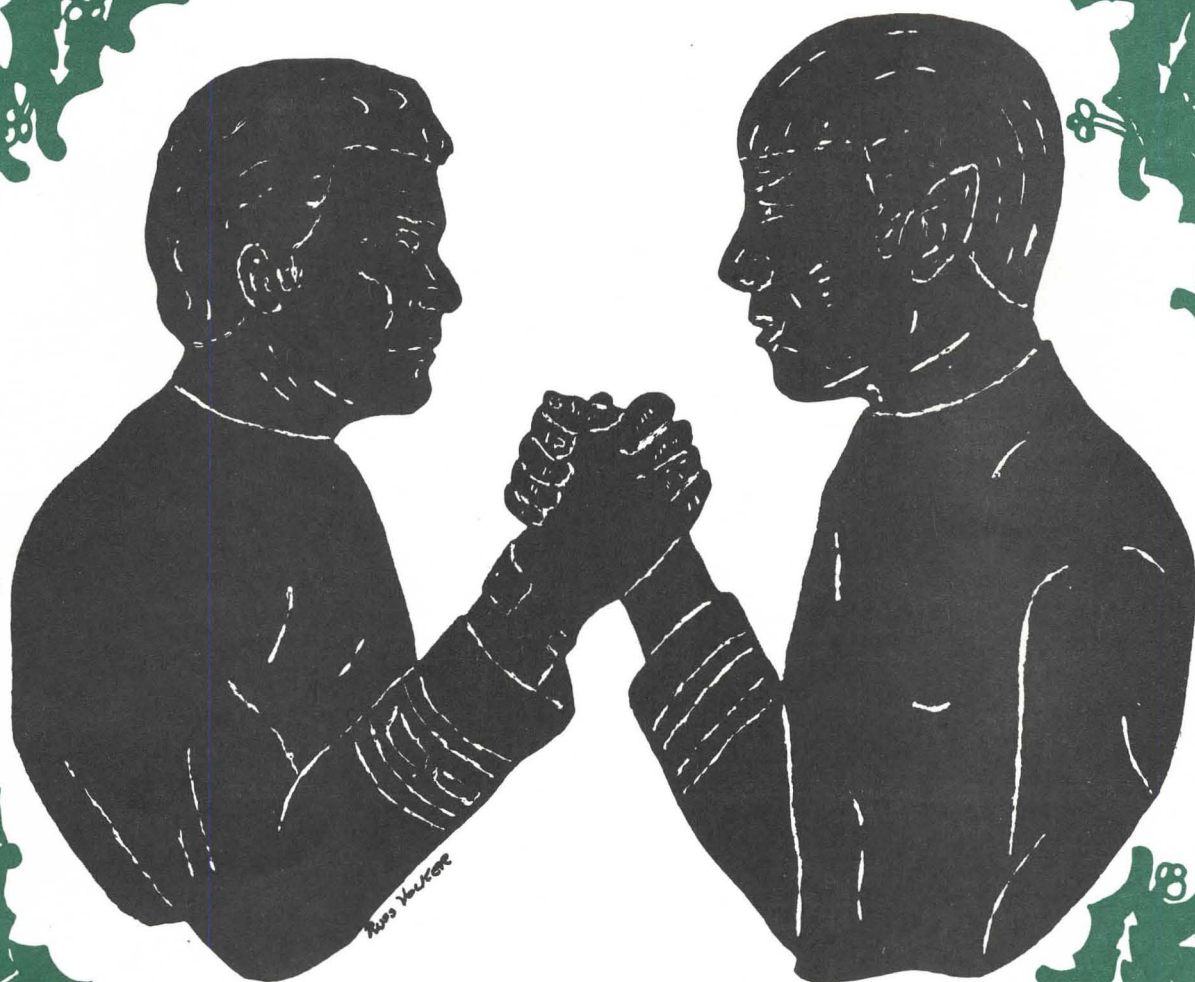


A CONTACT



CHRISTMAS

# A CONTACT CHRISTMAS

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## DEDICATION



This issue is dedicated to the spirit  
of Christmas and the spirit of STAR  
TREK -- in so many ways, one and the  
same. And to The Man who makes every-  
thing possible.



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**C**HRISTMAS - A SEASON OF JOY  
**O**F SHARING AND LOVING - THE  
**N**EW DEFINING THE OLD  
**E**ACHING THE TRUE MESSAGE OF  
**A**CCEPTANCE AND  
**C**HANGE.  
**T**HIS SPECIAL TIME OF

**C**HEER AND GOOD-WILL,  
**H**OPE FOR THE FUTURE AND  
**R**EACHING OUT WITH  
**E**NFINITE PEACE TO  
**E**EK NEW WORLDS  
**T**HERE IS A DEEPER  
**M**EANING IN THE STARS - THE  
**A**NSWER LIES IN LEARNING TO  
**S**HARE OUR HEARTS.

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# Editors' Page

*It's all Martha's fault.*

*Three years ago, Martha had a bright idea. She wrote a Kirk/Spock Christmas story to share with her friends for the holiday. It was so enthusiastically received that the following year, we wrote a Kirk/Spock Christmas story to share with our friends. We thought it would end there.*

*Musing upon these two unpublished stories one day, we began to consider the prospect of putting together a special holiday edition of CONTACT. We talked it over with a number of other writers, and everyone was excited and eager to participate. The idea came into full bloom while we were doing layout for CONTACT 5/6.*

*It's hard to believe we're going through this insanity again, only two months later, at a time of year when most people are combing the department stores for just-right gifts, baking cookies, and decking their private halls with boughs of holly, mistletoe and plastic Santas. Believe it or not, we're doing all that, too - while pasting numbers on pages, typing until 2 a.m., rushing to printers and recording orders. But we feel the Christmas spirit as much in these latter endeavors as in the former. Love of STAR TREK, the joy of the Kirk/Spock relationship, symbolize the true spirit of Christmas just as much as the traditional sentiments. Christmas is brotherhood, a hope for the future of mankind, good will and family closeness - and so is STAR TREK.*



This year, we have a special reason for rejoicing. In this season of giving, we've all been given the greatest gift of all - the fulfillment of a dream, the accomplishment of years of struggle. Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus - and dreams do come true. This year, we can all sit in a darkened theatre and see Kirk, Spock and McCoy once more sailing the stars in a very special ship named ENTERPRISE, and know that we, too, have come home.

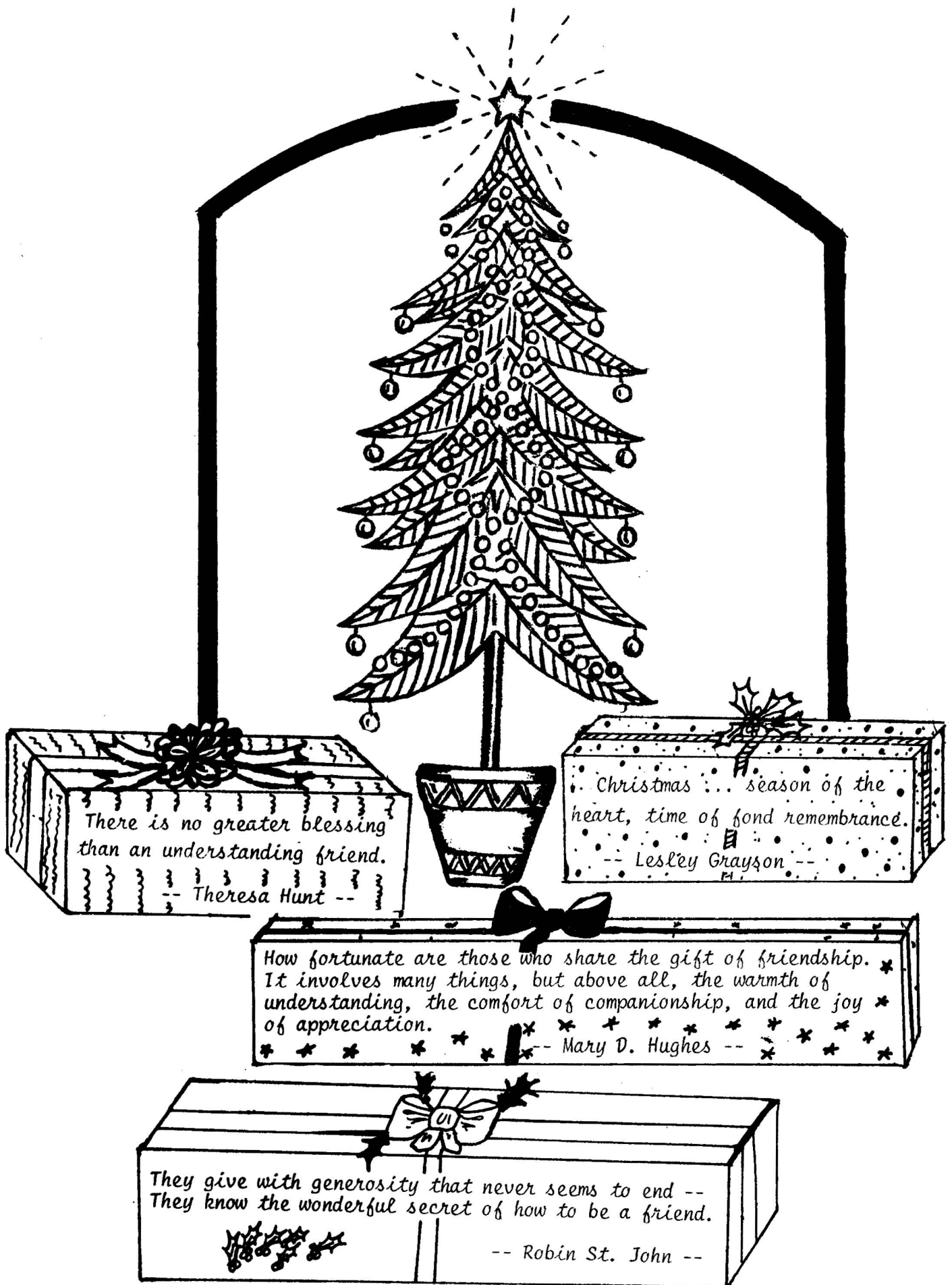
Now, we invite you to share our jubilation, to enjoy the diversity of our authors' interpretations. When we asked for 'Kirk/Spock Christmas stories' we couldn't have imagined such varied responses, or artists who were willing to fit 'just one little illo' into busy personal schedules. Again, our friends responded, and again, we're able to share with you.

That's what Christmas is all about.

Whatever your beliefs, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah,  
Peace on earth, Tidings of joy --

We are One - We Reach,

*Bev and Nancy*



# A GIFT OF GOLD

**Nancy Kippax**

**and**

**Beverly Volker**

*Pain. . . dull, throbbing, all consuming. . . undefinable. . .  
the beginning and the end of all things. Alone. . . contained. . .  
the lips parched, they will not speak.*

*"Easy, Spock. I'm here."*

*"Where. . . ? Where are you?" The words form, but no sound is  
heard.*

*"I'm here with you." The voice comes from the end of a long  
tunnel. It is a familiar voice. "Here, feel my hand." A gentle yet  
firm pressure, warm, strong, takes his hand. He wants to respond but  
cannot make his fingers do as his mind directs.*

*"Try to open your eyes, Spock. Slowly. . . you've been very sick."*

*The voice is commanding yet compassionate. He concentrates on  
obeying and his eyes open slightly. The light hurts.*

*Pain. . . sharp, searing, jabbing agony into his head. He blinks  
his eyes shut again in defense.*

*"Never mind. Don't try it yet."*

*"Whaa. . ." He must speak, communicate with the disembodied voice.  
The pressure on his hand is removed, then he feels a solid, tender grip  
around his shoulders. He is being lifted a little and something cool*

and smooth is pressed to his lips. A welcome wetness fills his mouth and he swallows greedily, savoring the feel of the tasteless liquid. He is aware of the secure stability supporting him and the pain becomes less acute as tactile impressions begin to coalesce. Now the form lifting his shoulders, giving him water, begins to have meaning and the voice has a name.

"Jim?" The word is barely more than a whisper, but it is audible.

"Yes, Spock."

He is lowered back down and the arm slips from beneath him. He concentrates again on opening his eyes and this time he is successful -- just a slit, but he manages to see the blurred image in front of him. The face comes into focus and he recognizes the worried smile of relief on the Captain's features.

"Welcome back, Mister." The words are formal, the tone is not. There is a gentle squeeze on his shoulder. It hurts, but not too much. Memory fails him and he cannot recognize this place he is in. It is a room, but nowhere he has seen before, and he is lying on some sort of narrow bed. How did he get here? What is wrong with him? Answers elude him; he must ask, but he is so tired. It is too much effort to even stay awake. He feels his eyelids become heavy.

He is a Vulcan. He can control. . . pain. . . fatigue. . . He forces his eyes open again. The pain. . . it is difficult.

"I told you to go to sleep," Kirk gently admonishes. "The convulsions have worn out your body. You've got to give it a chance to rest naturally."

Convulsions? So many questions, but Jim will explain later. He tries to nod agreement, and the movement brings flashing jabs of pain to his head. He winces and feels the soothing touch of two steady hands stilling the hammering in his skull.

As sleep claims him, a lingering impression remains. The Captain was not in a uniform. Why does this seem significant?

Kirk pulled the blanket up over Spock and rose wearily from his friend's bedside. He checked the fire in the big stone fireplace. It was adequate, yet the room still seemed cold. He was grateful for the heavy woolen pullover sweater, even though it did feel bulky compared to the lightweight, thermal insulated outerwear that Starfleet issued. Walking over to the window, he peered outside. It was getting dark and it was still snowing.

The snow here on Ochre was not the stark white velvet beauty that he remembered and loved from his boyhood days in Earth's American midwest.



Here, it was a golden color that varied in shadows and drifts from the pale spun gold of butter to the deep brownish ochre tones which gave this planet its name. It was very unusual, yet just as beautiful as white snow, once you got used to it. At least Kirk had thought so, in the beginning, before the golden blanket had become a blizzard -- and their enemy.

He watched the alien landscape for a sign of an approaching figure. There was none. McCoy had been gone all afternoon, and Kirk was starting to feel anxious. Even in this blizzard he should have made it to the settlement and back with the supplies by now.

Kirk sneezed and moved away from the draft of the window, closer to the fire. He was aware of the persistent soreness in his throat and knew that part of the reason for the chill in the room must be the low-grade fever McCoy had diagnosed. That was why the doctor had insisted on going after the supplies himself.

"Sore throat, fever -- one beaut of a cold. All you need to do is go out there and get soaked in that damn gold snow of yours and I'll wind up trying to cure you of pneumonia with whatever kind of prehistoric medicine I can manage to dig up on this god-forsaken planet."

Kirk had conceded meekly, understanding that part of McCoy's ill humor was coming from the frustration he knew the doctor was feeling; frustration caused by days of trying to keep Spock alive, trying to counteract the poisonous venom of the alien animal, when he had no idea what the antidote was, watching Spock's body convulse over and over again as the poison spread through him. McCoy had worked on pure instinct.

"I could kill him as easily as the venom, Jim," he had said. "I don't know what medication to give him and neither do the natives. Anybody who's bitten by a Lakin is considered as good as dead."

Unbelievably, Spock still lived, his own incredible physiology taking over when McCoy's ministrations failed. Yet even now, the battle had not been won, and the illness was taking its toll on his body. If they didn't get help soon. . . if there were only some way to contact the Enterprise. . . if, if, if. Kirk berated himself unreasonably. It had been his suggestion that the three of them spend this long-awaited leave on Ochre, the Planet of Gold. Primitive, beautiful, it promised adventure and relaxation away from the pressures of the ship.

It had kept that promise until three days ago. Kirk, Spock, and McCoy had decided to explore some of the trails in the mountain area to the north of their cabin. The deep brown snow-clouds above had hung heavy and ominous with a threatening storm, but Spock had calculated it wouldn't arrive until later in the evening, so they would have time to complete their trek and be back home before it hit.

They had reached the foothills and were just beginning a winding upward trail when the Lekin had appeared from nowhere.

When the giant, carnivorous animals were on all fours, they stood higher than an average human's waist, but they could balance just as easily on their hind legs, which made their height over seven feet. Usually, they lived in the higher altitudes of the mountain range; to find one in the foothills was surprising. Apparently this one had been separated from its pack and was on the prowl, looking for food.

A golden blur of attacking fur had leaped at Spock from an overhanging rock ledge, sinking its deadly claws and fangs into the heavy material of his outerwear. Within moments the fabric was ripped in several places and a seeping green wetness indicated that the Lekin had ripped flesh as well. Spock struggled for a handhold to apply a nerve-pinch, while Kirk and McCoy were helpless, trying to get a clear shot at the moving target with the primitive weapons they carried.

It was finally young David's weapon that hit the mark, as Kirk hurled a well-aimed rock at the creature's skull. The Lekin was stunned enough for a moment to back off and Spock swiftly squeezed the strategic place on its neck.

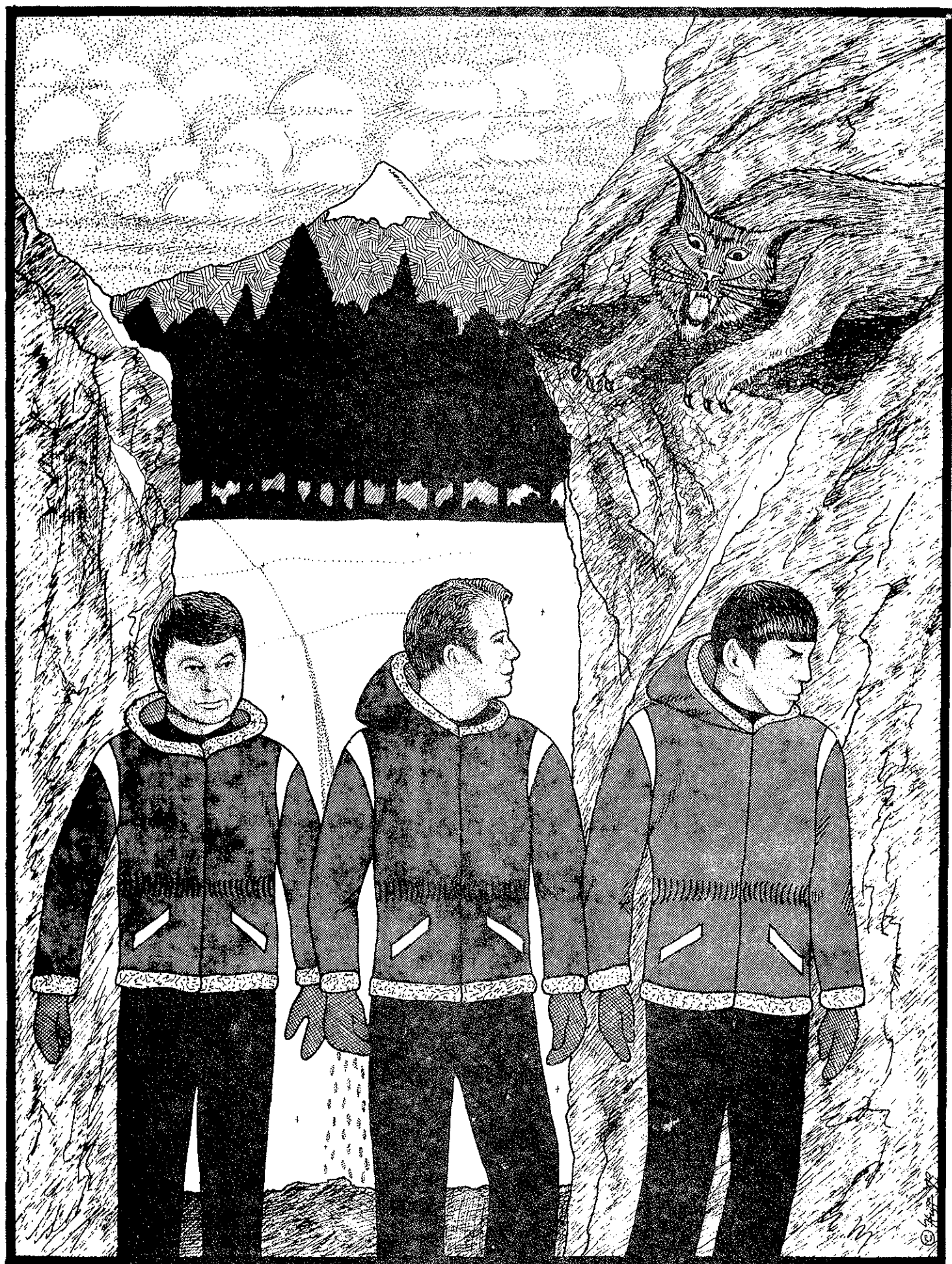
The animal fell away and Spock collapsed to the ground, the deadly venom from the Lekin already spreading through his bloodstream. Green stained the golden blanket as Kirk lifted Spock's shuddering frame on his lap. McCoy's hypospray hissed once, then all was silent, an agonizing void.



The trek back to the cabin had been a nightmare. McCoy's emergency first-aid had stopped the bleeding, but the ill effects of the venom were rapidly exhibiting themselves. Spock was only semi-conscious, hallucinating, and kept fighting them. Struggling with the Vulcan made travel slow, so that they were only halfway home when the blizzard hit. The wind whirled, gales of blinding gold, obstructing their vision and confusing their sense of direction. They rushed on, freezing cold dulled by the adrenalin flow of fear, finally sighting their cabin just as they didn't think it would be possible to go any further that night.

The cabin afforded warmth and shelter, but no relief for Spock's injuries. The blizzard made travel to the village impossible and for the next few days Kirk and McCoy lived on dwindling supplies while holding an anxious vigil on their Vulcan friend, knowing that at any moment it may be all over.

Finally McCoy had determined to travel to the settlement for much needed supplies. The storm appeared to have abated some, and



they could really wait no longer. Kirk added this last morsel of worry to the others as he stood before the fire. All the trouble, all the hardships they were enduring were because of his damn foolish urge to view Ochre's golden snow. He should have taken more precautions, should have realized the folly of signing that non-interference waiver upon arrival, of sending the Enterprise away. Would he never learn not to jump into situations too hastily?

He coughed and shivered again. He felt very alone.



It was almost dark before Kirk heard McCoy's approach. The doctor trudged wearily into the cabin, his arms filled with supplies.

"Here -- let me help with that," Kirk offered, taking several of the sacks. McCoy shook the dusty golden snow from his clothes and disdainfully regarded the spreading yellow puddle at his feet. "I was beginning to worry about you," Kirk told him. "What took so long?"

"Do you realize it took me almost an hour just to reach the settlement through this snow? Damn fool way to travel," McCoy grumbled. "Then, when I got there, everyplace I went was crowded as Gideon. I think every single inhabitant of Ochre was busy today."

"Hmn. . . ." Kirk was preoccupied, delving in the sacks and putting things away. "I wonder why."

"From what I could make out, tomorrow's some kind of festival for them. It was a good thing I went in today, because everything will be closed tomorrow for the celebration."

Kirk sneezed and wiped his nose, then turned sympathetically to McCoy. "You must be exhausted. Sit down. I'll fix us something to eat. I don't want you getting sick, too."

"All right," McCoy said automatically as he ran a towel over his damp hair. Then, with no intention of obeying, he turned toward the alcove where Spock was resting.

"How is he?" he asked Kirk softly.

Kirk put down the sack and joined McCoy at the Vulcan's bed. "Better, I think. He seemed a little more lucid for a minute this afternoon. Perhaps he's coming out of it."

McCoy ran a scanner over the inert form of their friend. "His body's still fighting. I don't know, Jim. . . maybe this *is* a season of miracles." He sat beside Spock.

"A. . . what?" Kirk asked.

McCoy shrugged. "Oh, just something a native said this afternoon. They believe in miracles in conjunction with this celebration of theirs." The doctor rested his hand on Spock's arm. "I feel so useless, Jim -- so. . . helpless."

The Vulcan stirred, as if sensing McCoy's concern. Kirk knelt beside the low bed. "You're doing the best you can, Bones. That's all any of us can do."

McCoy stood up and paced in despair. "Three days! That fever's been ravaging his system for over three days now. How much longer can his body hold out? Congestion in both lungs, the poison in his bloodstream causing muscle contractions, pain so intense that you or I couldn't stand it. At least on the ship I might have a fighting chance. With proper lab equipment -- "

"I know," Kirk cut him off sharply. "Don't forget, this isolation was all my idea." The guilt and frustration was a bitter ache.

Spock's body suddenly jackknifed. McCoy reached the bed to grab hold just as Kirk managed to subdue the convulsing Spock. Quickly, the doctor pressed a hypospray against the Vulcan's shoulder, and in a moment the shudders decreased to occasional quivers.

McCoy straightened the covers and sponged the Vulcan's sweat-streaked face while Kirk gazed wordlessly at Spock. Finally, McCoy put his arm around the Captain.

"C'mon, Jim. He'll rest now. There's nothing more we can do."

Kirk stood, feeling his muscles resist with a throbbing ache. As if sensing Kirk's discomfort, McCoy turned the medi-scanner toward him.

"I'm all right, Bones," Kirk waved him off.

"Sure you are. Temperature 101, little germs multiplying rapidly -- you look like hell, too."

Kirk ignored the comments, just as he was unsuccessfully trying to ignore his throbbing sinuses, scratchy throat and all the other annoying cold symptoms. "I'm going to have some coffee -- join me?" he invited.

"If you put a shot of brandy in that, I might consider," McCoy smiled fondly.

"No liquor on Ochre, remember?" Kirk returned the smile.

"Yeah, that's right. There's that damn non-interference directive again. That's what got us into all this trouble in the first place."



Kirk and McCoy sat across from each other at the wooden table, and Kirk passed a mug to the doctor. "It's valid, Bones, no matter how we may feel right now. The inhabitants of Ochre agreed to let visitors on their world only if the Federation could assure them there would be no contamination. Their ways may be primitive by our standards, but we can't fault their philosophy."

"I know," McCoy muttered wearily. "So we came here with no phasers, no conveniences -- it was just a blessing that they allowed medical equipment."

"I. . . thought it would be fun. . . a challenge. If I had only known. . ." Kirk shook his head sadly, damning his own illogic.

"Jim, don't blame yourself. You couldn't have known -- none of us could. People are always visiting Ochre. A lot of people are as enchanted as you were by the visions of golden snow, and golden trees, and golden people, and golden -- "

"It seems that all that glitters *isn't* gold," Kirk cut him off. "Spock is in agony now because of me. He may. . . die. . . "

"No!" McCoy told him fiercely. "We all agreed to this leave. Spock was enjoying it as much as you or me."

Kirk knew his friend was right; memories of their first few days here drifted capriciously through his mind. He had even managed to embroil the stoic Vulcan into a snowball fight -- he and McCoy had laughed until their sides hurt at the precise, logical way Spock had participated in the battle. The three of them had invaded the settlement nearly every other day, enjoying the local entertainment and affairs, only to return to the relative sanctuary of their cabin at dusk, to pursuits that only they could share. It had been a time of companionship, of talk and laughter, as only three friends as close as they were could understand. Yes, Kirk reflected, Spock *had* been enjoying it. Until. . .

He sobered and nodded grimly. "I guess this cold's just got my spirits down," he apologized.

"I prescribe a good night's sleep," McCoy told him. "And I don't mean one of those little cat-naps you've been getting. I mean a good, solid eight hours or more. Don't push your luck, Jim."

"I'll try," Kirk promised. "But not right now."

"Yes, right now, Captain. If you won't go to bed voluntarily, I'll give you a shot that'll knock you out for twelve hours." His voice softened. "I can take care of Spock, you know."

Kirk regarded the doctor speculatively. McCoy was not bluffing.

Piqued, Kirk rose and headed for his cot. "You're a tyrant, Doctor," he accused.

"Just doin' my job, Captain. See you in the morning, Jim," he added kindly.



Morning dawned crystal clear. Kirk was heartened to find that the snow had stopped falling and the brilliant golden sun was shining brightly. That, and the rest he had managed to get, were enough to revive his dragging spirits. Then he crossed to Spock's alcove, and was immediately plunged into despair. No change. McCoy tried to seem optimistic, informing Kirk that there was a slight decline in Spock's elevated metabolic rate.

"It's not much, but it's the first positive sign I've read."

Kirk sat beside the Vulcan and laid a hand along one damp cheek. "Maybe we'll beat this yet, Spock," he said softly, half to himself. McCoy stood wearily.

"I'm going to get some rest, Jim. If you need me -- "

"Sure. Go on, Bones." Kirk didn't turn his eyes from Spock's face as the doctor left.

It could only have been several minutes later that Kirk heard a curious sound from outside the cabin. Crossing to the door, he opened it a tiny crack to peer out. At first he saw nothing, and heard only a high-pitched sound of what seemed like tinkling wind-chimes. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the blinding golden glow of sun on snow, he could discern what looked like a caravan of sleds and people coming up the hill toward their cabin. The melodious tintinabulation combined with voices; soft, distant notes strung out across the space which separated them. The golden inhabitants were singing -- strange, soothing tunes, alien but harmonious. As the caravan drew closer, Kirk turned back to the interior of the cabin.

"Bones -- come here!" he called. McCoy was already starting toward the door.

"What's goin' on out there?" he questioned gruffly, irritated at having his rest disturbed.

"I. . . think we've got visitors." The two men watched as the lead sled pulled up in front of their cabin and the occupants began to climb out. Each golden face was smiling broadly, cheeks flushed brown from the cold.

Kirk groaned inwardly. He had no desire to play host this morning, no wish to entertain visitors or to be entertained. For what reason had these people come all the way out here?

Reluctantly, he opened the door a little wider, as more sleds pulled alongside the first, and more villagers disembarked. There were perhaps eight or nine men and women. One man detached himself from the group and clumped through the snow to the door.

"Our greetings and cheer, strangers!" he boomed in less than perfect Standard. Kirk noticed absently that the other people were pulling boxes and bags out of the sleds as they, too, trudged through the snow with their burdens.

"Good morning," Kirk replied, wondering what this was all about.

"We bring gifts of the season. May we come in?" the leader asked merrily.

"Gifts? Yes, I. . . of course," Kirk recovered, stepping aside. The men and women filed in, several of them repeating a greeting in their native tongue as they entered. Kirk closed the door behind them, looking to the man whom he had decided was their spokesman for an explanation.

"We have brought food -- " he indicated the covered dishes the women were setting on the table, " -- prepared for you." Kirk caught the tantalizing aroma and found himself sniffing in anticipation after almost two weeks of his own abominable cooking. He moved toward the table as the man went on. "There is more food in the boxes, homemade and nourishing. We have also brought. . . but, look." He held out another box.

Kirk and McCoy clustered around him and began emptying the contents on the table. There were warm woolen mufflers -- three of them -- and odd-shaped reeds that might have been instruments of some sort, a complete set of bells such as they had seen on the natives' sleds, and several large, twisted candles.

"Thank you." Kirk threw a confused look at McCoy. "But I don't understand. . . "

"It is the custom of our people," the leader explained, "that during our Celebration of the Golden One no one be excluded. We knew that you were alone today, and that one of you was sickened by the Lekin bite. We wished to share our Time of Giving with you."

Kirk found himself touched by the goodness and sincerity of these simple people. McCoy, too, felt a strong emotional response to their kindness.

"Everything looks just marvelous," McCoy smiled broadly.

Just then a sound emerged from Spock's alcove. McCoy and Kirk turned anxiously toward the sound, the doctor moving at once in that direction.

"Go," the leader told them, understanding.

Gratefully, Kirk followed McCoy's path. He found the doctor bending over a quite lucid, though weak looking, Spock.

"The fever's gone, Jim!" McCoy exulted. "It's broken at last!"

Kirk felt the release from worry and fear slide through him with tingling delight. As if a tremendous weight had been lifted from his chest, he crossed swiftly to the bed to sit at the Vulcan's side. Several of the people had come to stand in the doorway. When they saw the Vulcan apparently recovered, they began smiling and nodding, talking to each other in low, alien tones.

One young woman came into the room and shyly put her hand on Kirk's shoulder as he knelt beside Spock. He looked around at the touch and gazed into a face that seemed to be glowing with joy. Kirk was moved by the obvious caring of people that could so rejoice at a stranger's happiness. He smiled at the girl, yet only partially comprehending the look on her face.

"He's going to be all right," he explained. She murmured something which meant, Kirk deduced, that she associated Spock's recovery with this day of celebration.

The man who spoke Standard finally pushed through the crowd and quietly ushered his people into the other room.

"This is truly a Blessing," he said to Kirk and McCoy as he left the room.

Kirk turned his attention back to the bed. "How do you feel?"

"Somewhat disoriented, weak. . . " Spock began listing medical symptoms for McCoy, then realized the doctor was beaming broadly. He stopped abruptly and glanced at Kirk. "Who were those people who were just here?"

Kirk smiled affectionately. "Your Vulcan curiosity will never change, Mister Spock. We have visitors -- some natives have chosen to share their festival with us."

Spock nodded, his eyelids beginning to droop uncharacteristically. "Indeed," he murmured. Then, "I am tired, Captain. It seems I have been ill a long time. How. . . "

"Never mind that now, Spock," McCoy ordered. "Jim -- he still needs rest," he cautioned.

"Of course," Kirk responded, standing up. Spock's eyes closed slowly in fatigue. "I'll be back shortly," Kirk promised him softly.

Joyously, he returned to the other room.

"My friend -- is recovered," Kirk told the expectant faces. "The fever's gone -- he's going to live!"

The leader repeated his words to them and they all broke out in broad smiles. "It is truly a miracle of the Time," the leader said in Standard. "For one to survive the bite of the Lekin is unknown." He turned to the others. "Go -- bring the Chaladah!"

McCoy came to Kirk's side and the two Enterprise officers exchanged a look of puzzlement. Spock's recovery had so bolstered their spirits, though, that whatever the natives had planned no longer mattered.

Still, Kirk was surprised when the two men who had left returned bearing a large, fully-blooming, golden tree. Kirk had seen them growing wild -- they were round, like a gigantic bush, with golden foliage and large white and azure flowers.

The natives fastened a holder to the stem and stood the tree in the middle of the floor, as a glimmer of suspicion began to assail Kirk.

"Now," the leader said triumphantly, "you are truly ready for the Celebration of the Golden One! Joyous Beginning!"

The other natives repeated in unison in their own tongue, and Kirk recognized it as the greeting they had given upon arrival. Trees. . . presents. . . it began to coalesce into a pattern.

"Please," Kirk addressed the leader. "We know so little of your customs. What is this Celebration of the Golden One?"

"We commemorate the birth of the Golden One -- the only true King of Ochre. He is the Bright Son, the Savior of our people. It is Him whom we praise and place above all other things," the leader explained. "He was born many generations ago, sent to us as a humble child that we might learn the way of Peace and Love. It is believed that the Miracle of His Birth makes this a special Time when other miracles occur. The recovery of your friend was such, and my people feel blessed to have witnessed it."

The warmth within Kirk was spreading, filling him with its gentle flame. Spock and McCoy would probably be able to give him scientific reasons for the recovery from the Lekin venom, but for now, he preferred this simple native's explanation.



"We have a Celebration somewhat like yours among our people, too," he told the man softly. "We call it Christmas. You have given us our Christmas by sharing yours with us."

"It is good, then," the leader said. He gestured to his friends. "We shall leave you now to enjoy the Peace of this day and to rejoice in the recovery of your companion. May the Golden One smile on you always."

Kirk and McCoy stood at the door as the people climbed back in their sleds. The natives drifted effortlessly away, and for some time the echoes of their joyous singing could be heard in the little cabin.

"Bones -- warm up that food. I think I'm hungry," Kirk said, closing the door. As they turned, they were startled to see Spock standing unsteadily by the screen of his alcove. Kirk moved swiftly to his side.

"What are you doing up?" he asked gently. "Here -- sit down." Putting his arms around Spock's chest, he guided the Vulcan to the couch. Spock was looking at the tree with undisguised confusion.

"Jim? What is that tree doing in here?" he asked.

"Haven't you ever seen a Christmas tree before, Spock?" The Vulcan looked at him in total disbelief. Kirk laughed, overjoyed at Spock's bewilderment. "We've just been treated to a Golden Christmas. And there *is* much to be thankful for, my Vulcan friend."

Spock leaned back, weakened by the exertion. Jim sat beside him and put a hand on his arm. "Welcome back, Spock," he said softly.

Spock turned understanding eyes on his Captain. "It is indeed a pleasure to be back, Captain."

McCoy came to join them. "I don't know, Jim. Whether it was a miracle, like the natives believe, or whether it was just a combination of things I did and his Vulcan physiology, he's probably a medical first." He knelt beside the Vulcan. "Spock, I. . . " he faltered, then smiled. "Merry Christmas."

A familiar eyebrow rose, but Spock made no caustic comment. Something in the doctor's face conveyed a tenderness not to be scorned and he accepted it without question. The moment was interrupted as an attack of croup-like coughing assailed Kirk. Both his officers fixed their attention on him.

"Captain, you sound quite unwell," Spock observed, concerned.

Kirk waved a negative motion with his hand, wheezing, trying to

catch his breath. McCoy would not be dismissed. He stood, taking Kirk by the arm.

"He *is* unwell, Spock, and too stubborn to admit it." He gave Kirk a gentle tug. "C'mon, enough of this celebrating for you. You're going to spend the rest of the day in bed and if you mind your manners I might consent to letting you consume some of that home cooking the villagers brought." Kirk started to protest. "Any backtalk and it's a straight liquid diet for three days."

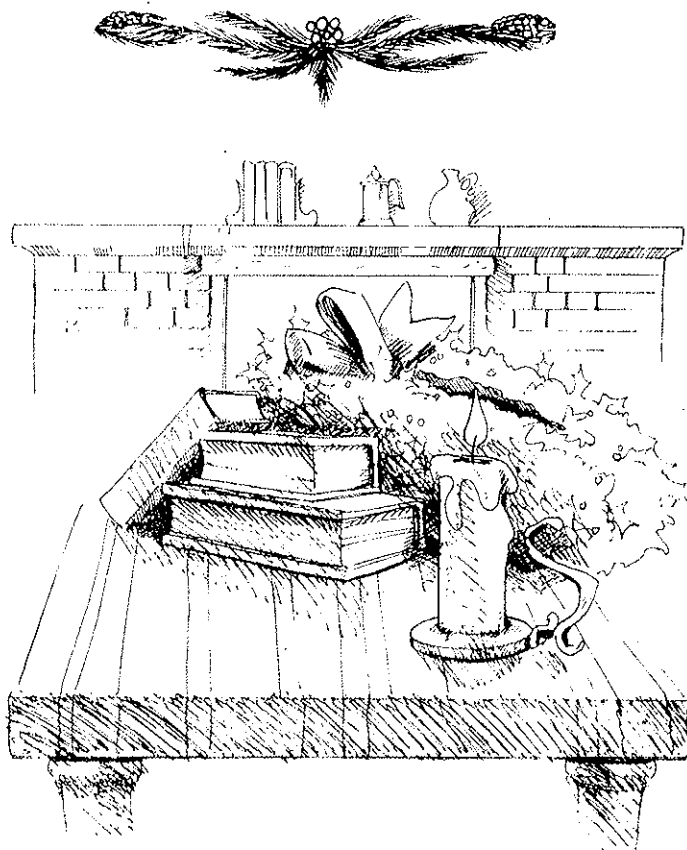
Kirk threw a resigned look at Spock. There was no use arguing with McCoy when he was in his 'old country doctor' role.

"He has a little help and affects a miracle cure, and right away he thinks he can also cure the common cold."


"I think you'd better listen to him, Jim," Spock advised. Then, questioning, "Had help? From whom?"

McCoy and Kirk exchanged smiles.

"Never mind, Spock," Kirk grinned. "Joyous Beginning."



# BELIEVING



DO YOU BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS?  
I USED TO.  
THEN, I GREW UP.  
THINGS DIDN'T ALWAYS GO RIGHT  
JUST BECAUSE I TRIED TO BE GOOD.  
AND ANYWAY, I WASN'T ALWAYS  
GOOD,  
NOT NOBLE, JUST LUCKY.  
YET I STILL NEEDED SOMETHING  
TO BELIEVE IN --  
THIS SHIP,  
THE MISSION,  
OUR OWN SPECIAL STARS...  
I THOUGHT, FOR A WHILE,  
EVEN ALL OF THAT HAD ENDED.  
BUT MAYBE I WAS GOOD  
THIS YEAR.  
LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING'S GOING RIGHT  
FOR ME AGAIN.  
WE'VE GOT IT BACK  
AND I BELIEVE IN YOU.

-- Martha J. Bonds --

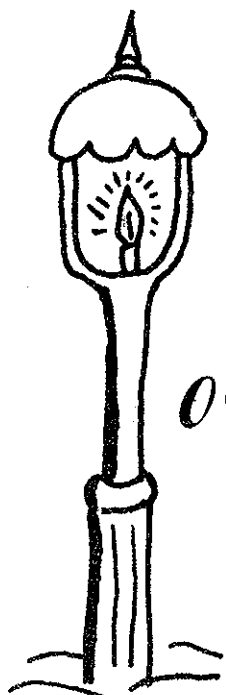
## Reasons Enough

Perhaps it is not logical  
To dress up as Santa Claus,  
Perhaps it is not logical  
For Christmas trees and mistletoe,  
Perhaps it is not logical  
To give gifts from the heart and soul,  
But my friend, it gives me the chance  
To show my thanks for the support  
You offer me the whole year through,  
To express my gratitude and my love  
That you stand by my side through right and wrong.  
Thus to see you almost smile,  
And to hear you subtly tease,  
Those are reasons enough for me.

I have no intention of letting you  
Be lonely ever again. Or guilty  
Of hiding all your love and care  
Within a prison deep and bare.  
Of returning to walls where no laughter rings,  
Of standing alone without a friend to share.  
This season still rings with joy and love, warmth and  
Brotherhood envelopes all, and I care not what foolishness  
I must endure, or what price I have to pay to bring it to you.  
I will not see you have one more loveless day  
Or unhappy night spent in lonely vigil. I will not have  
You yearn one more time for kind words, or understanding  
Hearts, I will not have you stand apart from men  
Without the strength of love to see you through.  
Call it foolish, or romantic dream,  
But these are reasons enough for me.







# *A MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS PAST*

**Martha J. Bonds**

Ben Adams shivered as he walked across the tracks toward the roundhouse. He pulled his hat down and tightened his scarf against the wind. It was Christmas Eve, 1940 and he was anxious to get home, to sit down to a warm dinner served by his wife. He wanted to see the look on his little daughter's face when she hung up her stocking for Santa. Ben Adams, brakeman on the B and O line, was essentially a soft-hearted idealist, a man who enjoyed Christmas because it was one time of the year when he could openly express the great love that was always in his heart for his family and his fellow man.

He spotted the small fire between the tracks and turned toward it, his heart naturally going out to whatever poor vagrant was sitting in the cold dusk on Christmas Eve. It might be that some acquaintances of his were down there. He could at least stop and wish them well.

Ben was surprised when he saw the lone figure crouching beside the small fire. In the light cast by the flickering flames, he thought he recognized the youngish face of a man he hadn't seen around for a couple of months. He wasn't sure, though; this fellow was usually in the company of another man.

"Jim? Is that you, Jim?" Ben called out, quickening his pace toward the hobo camp.

The man looked up at the sound of the deep voice, a hopeful smile crossing his face. Then it faded and a more somber expression returned. He stood up as Adams approached.

"I thought that was you!" Ben continued heartily, reaching for the man's hand. "Kirk, isn't it? I'm Ben Adams."

Recognition finally dawned in the vague eyes. "Yes," the man responded slowly. "I remember. You're a ... brakeman, aren't you? You helped me get one of my first rides."

"That's it! Still riding the rails? It's been quite a while since you've passed through here," Ben smiled affably.

"I'm still riding. I guess it was October when we... when I last came through this town."

"That's right. You were always with that other guy, the quiet one. I almost didn't know you without him, as a matter of fact. Where is he?"

Jim Kirk hesitated a moment, and glanced away from the earnest, curious eyes of Ben Adams. "I haven't seen him since I was last here."

"You two split up or something?" Ben persisted.

"Something like that," Kirk answered, staring down into his fire.

"What was that guy's name?"

"Spock. It was Spock."

Ben Adams finally noticed the tone of Kirk's voice. There was something - something haunted in it, a hurt sound, as if a great unspoken ache lay behind the words. And the look on his face - lost and lonesome. Ben almost held back, not wanting to say the wrong thing, but he had to find the cause for such sadness on Christmas. It was more than being outside without a home. Kirk was used to that, Ben reasoned. It didn't matter where you were for the holiday, as long as you weren't alone.

"You two have a falling out?" he finally blurted.

Kirk looked up sharply, then his expression relaxed. "No, not that. I wish it was as simple as that," he said ruefully. "We just ... got separated and I haven't been able to find him." When Ben cast an understanding look at him, Kirk drew in a long sigh, then continued speaking, the words tumbling out as though he longed to say them to someone, anyone who would listen.

"There was... something we had to do, up in Philadelphia. I went up there, hoping I'd locate him. But he wasn't there. I've been searching all over - all the places we've been - for the past two months. That's why I finally came back here. We... had an appointment. But it's almost too late, now. I'm not sure I'll ever find him."

"You think something happened to him?" Ben sounded doubtful of this possibility.

"Well, he wouldn't have walked out on me."

The finality in Kirk's voice stilled Ben's protest. "But who would have robbed him? He was just a rail-rider like you, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, just like me," Kirk answered, his voice low.

The two strangers stood quietly beside the crackling fire for a moment, an uncomfortable silence between them. Ben glanced at Kirk, taking in the defeated slump in his shoulders, the way he stood dejectedly with his hands in the pockets of his seedy coat. Somehow, Ben had hurt him, when he'd only meant to wish him well. Kirk was such a strange guy, almost as odd as that friend of his. They seemed, somehow, out of place with the other bums who Ben met in the rail yard, as if they belonged in a better place than the cold, sooty world of 1940.

They were different from all the rest, yet together they seemed so... Ben searched his mind for the right word. They seemed so complimentary. The tall, thoughtful Spock had perfectly complimented the friendlier, more outspoken Kirk.

Ben wanted to do something to make up for the discomfort he'd caused. "Why don't you come with me, Jim? Home to dinner, I mean. My Molly won't mind. It'd be better than eating out of a can here in the cold."

Kirk hesitated, then smiled. "Okay, Ben. I think I'd like that."



By the time the two men had walked across town, Jim had relaxed considerably, almost enjoying the conversation with the friendly brakeman. It had been quite a while since he'd had anyone to talk to, not that he could really have talked to Ben. How could he have explained why he and Spock seemed so out of place, so different?

How he wanted to take hold of Ben's shoulders, look him right in the eye and say, "I'm from your future, and my friend, that 'quiet guy' is from another planet, and we came back here to find a sociologist from our own time and take him back with us!" But if he said that, Kirk knew Ben Adams would be leading him to the police station instead of to his home for dinner.

The door to Ben's rowhouse was opened by a frisky little girl who immediately flung herself into her Daddy's arms, squealing, giggling and talking all at once. Ben grinned and listened and motioned Kirk to enter.

He put his daughter down saying, "Elizabeth, this is Mr. Kirk. He's come home for dinner with me."

The red-headed child grew quiet and reached out a hand. "How do you do, Mr. Kirk?"

His heart melted. Her blue eyes and saucy smile brought out the charm he thought he'd forgotten and Kirk smiled back at her. "I'm pleased to meet you, Elizabeth."

"And this is my Molly," Ben was saying.

Kirk looked up to meet another pair of bright, blue eyes. Though not exactly unfriendly, they were not quite as welcoming as Elizabeth's.

"Ben was kind enough to offer me some companionship tonight, Mrs. Adams," Kirk said as politely as he knew how. "I do hope my presence isn't an imposition." He smiled, trying to look like a decent sort despite the tacky costume he wore.

Molly took in his whole appearance, and must have concluded that Kirk was all right. She smiled back. "Just come right on in, Mr. Kirk. Ben does bring home all kinds, but he's a good judge of character."

Kirk was embarrassed by her forthright approach. Molly noticed and immediately smoothed things over. "Let me help you off with your coat. You must be freezing. Step up to the fire while I pour you a hot cup of coffee."

Jim mumbled his thanks and walked to the fireplace. As he warmed his chilled frame, he noticed the mantle was gaily decorated with a reindeer and sleigh carved of wood. In one corner, a tree was practically obscured by lights, tinsel, glass ornaments, homemade paper decorations, and strings of popcorn and cranberries. It was like pictures he'd seen, times he'd only heard about. Even his own Christmases as a boy had never been like this.

"Elizabeth wanted an 'old-fashioned' Christmas, down to candles on the tree, but I said electric lights were much safer." Molly smiled again as she handed a steaming mug to Kirk.

"I'm sure they are," he answered, inwardly amused by her use of the term 'old-fashioned.'

Two older boys arrived and Kirk sat down to dinner with the family. Huge platters of food were passed and he was encouraged to eat well. Jim ate, not really tasting the fried chicken and home-grown vegetables. It had been a long time since he'd had a good meal, but there were other things on his mind.

Ben and Molly both tried to draw him into conversation, but he grew quiet. The time was so short. He would have to leave Baltimore in only twelve hours if he wanted to make the rendezvous in Philadelphia. The Enterprise would return via time-warp, expecting to beam up three people, and lock on to only one subcutaneous transponder - his own.

His eyes closed wearily as he remembered for the hundredth time the green blood on the floor of the flat he and Spock had rented across from the rail station in Baltimore. Kirk had spent a night

in jail thanks to his being in the wrong bar when a fight broke out. When he returned to the dingy apartment, he'd found no trace of Spock but the spattered blood and a smashed transponder.

It had to have been Lindstrom, the sociologist who had been sent back through a time-warp to study the conditions leading to the Second World War. When the investigator had failed to report three months ago, his psych records had been rechecked and a personality flaw was discovered. Sociologist Lindstrom was an upstanding scientist in every way except that he felt personally responsible whenever the culture he was studying went downhill. Starfleet decided that he must somehow be trying to alter history to prevent World War II. As officers who had experienced time travel before, Kirk and Spock had been selected to return and search for the errant do-gooder.

Through a private investigator, they learned that Lindstrom had become a hobo, riding for free in box cars, meeting other impoverished travelers. They heard stories about a strange man who talked about the future and the stars and who kept predicting U.S. involvement in the war, but Kirk and Spock never seemed to get close to Lindstrom until they reached Baltimore.

Kirk had gone to a bar with a vagrant who insisted he had seen Lindstrom there. It was only a few blocks from their apartment, and Kirk had left Spock, who tended to look terribly out of place standing with a full mug in his hand, alone to wait. But Kirk was arrested and could not return until morning. Later, he reasoned that Lindstrom must have seen him leave, entered the apartment and attacked Spock. All searching, even the attempts made by the investigator and Kirk's rail-riding acquaintances had failed to turn up a trace of either Spock or Lindstrom.

Jim had gone on alone, following false leads, returning to all the places he and Spock had passed through together. He finally came back to Baltimore, hoping Spock would try to get back to the last place they'd seen one another.

"Mr. Kirk?" Molly's soft voice penetrated his thoughts. When he focused on her face, she asked, "Would you like some more chicken?"

"No, thank you," he answered, trying to smile. "Everything was very good, Mrs. Adams."

Molly shot a pointed glance at her husband. "I'll get the dessert and coffee, then. Ben, will you help me in the kitchen?"

Kirk saw Ben's look of surprise and realized Molly was planning on a private word with her husband about the "guest" he had dragged home. "Maybe I should be going," he offered.

"You just relax, Jim," Ben said firmly, following his wife out of the dining room.

The two tall sons excused themselves also, leaving Kirk at the table with Elizabeth. He smiled at her and she blushed, suddenly attacking the vegetables on her plate with gusto.

Kirk had never felt more uncomfortably out of place in his life. Whispered words flowed into his unwilling ears from the kitchen.

"What's wrong with that man, Ben?"

"He's all right, Molly. I tell you I know him pretty well." Kirk winced as he heard Ben lie to defend him.

"But he's so quiet, so withdrawn. He doesn't pay attention to what's going on. It's like only half of him is really here," Molly hissed.

"That's just it. He was telling me he's lost track of a friend of his. Seemed really worried and lost without the guy. They used to be together all the time."

"Oh, I see," Molly answered knowingly. "I remember how you were when your brother died. I'll talk to him."

Kirk wished he could disappear. Instead, he started a conversation with Elizabeth. "Are you all ready for Christmas?"

The big, blue eyes widened. "Oh, yes, I can't wait for Santa to come," she answered solemnly.

Molly and Ben stepped through the swinging door, carrying plates of apple pie, cups, saucers, and a coffee pot. "Elizabeth, dear, you must not bore Mr. Kirk. After all, a great big girl like you shouldn't believe in Santa Claus. You're twelve now."

"But Mommy, Daddy told me Christmas and Santa and families are all part of the same beautiful miracle of love. If there is no Santa, can't I at least believe in miracles?"

The mother smiled tolerantly. "Yes, dear. You go right on believing because what your Daddy says is true." Kirk saw the adoring look that the wife gave her husband, and he realized again how truly alone he was in their world of long ago, how alone he would be in his own world.

Molly had seen his expression and seized upon it as her opening. "Mr. Kirk, Ben told me you're upset about your friend. I'm really sorry. We've been rather insensitive to you tonight."

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered softly. "You've been very nice to take me in and give me dinner."

"But it's just not the same, is it?" the woman persisted sympathetically.

Kirk could not take much more of her solicitude, and raised his eyes to hers, determined to thank her for her hospitality and to leave at once, but he couldn't walk out, he couldn't repay her genuine concern by being rude.

Molly reached out and patted his hand. "It's truly hard to deal with grief and loneliness at holiday time. I understand. My own father died just two weeks ago."

"I miss Grandpa," came Elizabeth's tremulous voice.

"Molly... " Ben warned.

"But I try to remember all the wonderful Christmases we had together, even though I must face the fact that there will be no more," the mother continued matter-of-factly. "You must do the same, Mr. Kirk. Remember your friend... "

"I still hope my... friend is all right and that I'll find him," Kirk insisted, but he did not miss the look of pity - pity meant for him - that Ben and Molly Adams shared.

Ben tried to make him stay, inviting him to sleep in the extra room and be with the family for Christmas, and Elizabeth echoed his plea, yet Kirk refused. He remained a little while before the fire with Molly and her husband, not wanting to rush off too soon after dinner, but finally he rose to go.

Molly handed him his coat, and as he shrugged into it, Elizabeth hurried from her room with a tissue-wrapped bundle. "It's for you, Mr. Kirk," she said.

Jim's eyes filled. He did not know how to accept the small package she held up to him.

"Elizabeth, what...?" Molly began.

"It's okay. I think I know what it is," Ben soothed. "Go ahead, Jim."

His hands shook as he pulled the delicate paper away to reveal the very brightest yellow wool he'd ever seen. "What?" he questioned, sinking down to the little girl's level.

"I knitted them myself," she said, blushing. "A scarf and cap for Grandpa."

"Oh," Kirk said weakly. "I can't take these."

"Please, Mr. Kirk, I *want* you to have them." She reached up, winding the impossibly yellow scarf around his neck. "It's cold outside." Elizabeth started to hand him the cap.

"I already have a hat, honey," he said.

She paused, thinking rapidly, then smiled brightly as only a child who believes everything good happens on Christmas can. "You can give it to your friend. It matches."

"My friend?" Kirk mumbled. "What... what if I don't see him?"

Elizabeth leaned close to whisper in his ear. "I believe in miracles. You'll find him. Promise you'll give it to him?"

James Kirk put his hands on the child's shoulders and looked deep into the trusting blue eyes. "Please?" she begged.

"All right. I promise." Then he stood up stiffly, thanked Ben and Molly for dinner and stepped out into the cold.

He lost all track of time as he walked the deserted streets alone. He crossed the city to the rail yard, finding even the hobo campfire gone out. He followed the alleys to the place he'd last seen Spock, but he found only skinny, meowing cats and sleepy winos sprawled in doorways.

It was nearly dawn. Christmas day, he thought. Try to remember all the good times, even though there'll be no more.

He was cold, chilled through from the damp night air. Wearily, he leaned against a lamp post, pulling the yellow scarf more snugly around his neck. It was almost time to leave. He'd go back to the rail yard, hop a lonely freight car back to Philadelphia...

Footsteps rang out on the wet sidewalk. Kirk stiffened, expecting either a policeman or a thief to walk up behind him. The footsteps paused, and he turned, squinting his eyes under the harsh lamp light

"Jim!" The name was a strangled cry. Kirk felt a rush of movement, as the dark figure flung itself toward him. It was shaking all over, and then he was trembling, too, matching the quivering of the other body.

They were close, so close, holding, clasping each other tight, their breath pounding in each other's ears. For several seconds neither could speak. Then Kirk disentangled a little from the embrace and pulled back to gaze into Spock's drawn face.

"Oh, Jim." The sound was lost in the smile that washed over the Vulcan's haggard features, and told his Captain, without words, how desperately glad he was to have found him.





They had been back aboard the Enterprise nearly three hours. Spock had explained how, the night Jim had been arrested, he had found Lindstrom and taken him to the flat. Lindstrom had started ranting about wanting to stay in the twentieth century to set things straight. In his deranged fury, he'd overpowered Spock, cut open his arm to find and destroy the transponder, and kidnapped him. For nearly a month, in New York, he'd kept Spock tied, drugged and semi-conscious until Lindstrom's mental illness had progressed to the point that the sociologist slit his own wrists. Spock had gradually come to his senses, and although he was weak, completely disoriented and miles away, he'd managed to keep searching for his Captain.

The briefing room was in semi-darkness now, the lights automatically dimmed as ship's time approached midnight. Kirk and Spock still sat at the table, side by side, quietly marvelling how it just happened that they had found each other under the street light as Christmas morning dawned.

"I never comprehended my mother's nostalgia for what she called the miracle of Christmas," Spock said softly.

"Do you think you understand now, Spock?" Kirk smiled.

The Vulcan hesitated. "Miracles *are* very difficult to prove, Captain."

Kirk nodded solemnly, then, remembering his promise to Elizabeth, reached into the pocket of the worn jacket that hung over the back of his chair. Spock's eyebrow rose when he saw the yellow hat Kirk pushed across the table to him, and he looked shocked when Kirk pointed out that it matched the scarf still hanging around his own neck.

"It's a Christmas present for you, Spock. I promised someone who believes in miracles that I'd give it to you."

Spock took the hat, touching the awkwardly knit stitches. He nodded once, then looked directly at Kirk. "I am afraid I have no present for you, Captain."

Kirk shook his head. "That's not true. I've already had mine, Spock. I'll never forget it."

And Spock's mouth curved up slightly in gentle imitation of the loving, relieved smile he'd bestowed on Jim when they had finally found each other, miraculously, **that long** ago Christmas morning.



CHRISTMAS IS a star to follow and silver and twinkling lights

CHRISTMAS IS waking up in the morning and not knowing what surprises  
await you

CHRISTMAS IS an adventure

CHRISTMAS IS hope and reaching out to others to say "I care."

CHRISTMAS IS a warm bright spot amid the surrounding cold

CHRISTMAS IS sharing with those you love - and giving to those you  
love

CHRISTMAS IS a sense of wonder and dreams come true

CHRISTMAS IS the glow of a fire and the sound of a harp

CHRISTMAS IS coming home - from whatever diverse destinies our paths  
may take us upon

CHRISTMAS IS red and green

I think that here on the ENTERPRISE with you at my side - it is  
always Christmas.



# THE CHRISTMAS TREE

**Ginna LaCroix**

As the door shut behind him he leaned back against it, not having the strength or the willpower to make it across the room to his bed. He couldn't remember ever having been so mentally and physically exhausted. Every bone in his body ached from fatigue, his mind was crying out for the oblivion of sleep -- sleep that had been denied for too long.

It was only a week ago that he had been on Elba II -- it seemed like years. His body still ached from the phaser stuns and his mind still cried out at the remembrance of the excruciating pain of a once-harmless rehabilitation chair, both suffered at Garth's hands -- the man he had admired since his Academy days.

McCoy had certified Kirk as medically unfit for command, and Starfleet had deemed it necessary that he head the Federation delegation to the peace talks at Abidgneau. He had known how crucial the talks were. He knew that past attempts had bogged down due to the inability of the various races concerned to get along.

He was human. No other of his race was involved. He was an outsider. He was not a diplomat. James T. Kirk was possibly the only man who could guide such a complicated proceeding to a proper conclusion without having the whole thing blow up in his face.

His day did not start and stop as the conference did. He was on call twenty-four hours a day to soothe, cajole, joke, threaten, and occasionally exert the authority of his position to keep the talks going. As much as the other races did not agree, no matter how much they fought, they both admired and

resented the man who kept them returning for more talks.

But now he was exhausted. He had reached his limit. Wearily he made his way across the room to the bed and collapsed face first into its softness.



Spock waited uneasily in front of the closed door. Twice he had rung the buzzer but there was no reply. He knew that Kirk had left the banquet planning to go directly to his room. He pushed the buzzer again but still there was no answer. Frowning, he activated the lock and stepped into the room. Kirk was lying flat out on the bed, still in his dress uniform.

Silently Spock approached the bed. The even rise and fall of Kirk's breathing told the Vulcan that he was deeply asleep. Carefully Spock rolled him over and sat down on the bed, propping Kirk up against him as he undid the uniform shirt. As he eased it off, Kirk muttered quietly and turned toward the Vulcan, burying his head in Spock's shoulder, his arms around his waist. Instinctively, Spock's arm went around the human's shoulder, protectively, lovingly, remembering as he did so McCoy's parting words.

"Take care of him, Spock. He's hurt and he's exhausted. Every man has a breaking point. Endurance has its limits, even for him."

*How much does a man like this have to pay, Spock wondered, before he will be allowed to be like other men. . .* His thoughts were interrupted by the demanding summons of the intercom. He reached over and activated the audio, leaving the visual switched off.

Kirk stirred as the caller identified himself, surprised to find Spock's arm hugging him close and his own embrace. He let his hands drop but was grateful that Spock did not release his hold. It was the Andorian ambassador. There was more trouble and Kirk was urgently needed.

For a moment he slumped against Spock in defeat. He was too tired. He couldn't do the job he had been sent to do.

"Jim?"

He looked into the troubled brown eyes of the Vulcan -- the eyes that were an open mirror of the inner feelings. A slight

smile crossed his face. "I'm all right, Spock. I'm just so tired of egos and pointless bickering and seemingly unresolvable problems." He got up. "God, I'm so tired..." He stood with his head bowed for a moment, desperately trying to get control of a body and mind that no longer wanted to be controlled. Spock sat in helpless silence while Kirk dressed, then he was gone, to a place where only he could deal with the problem, where the Vulcan could do nothing to help.

The hours dragged past and still Kirk did not return. Spock grew increasingly restless as he waited. Kirk was like a tense coil, too tightly wound. He didn't dare let go -- too much was at stake, too much counted on him. Yet he was going to explode unless something could get him to release all the fears and frustrations of the past days.

As Spock stood looking out the window, a sudden thought came to him. He remembered his youth, how his mother had made a big occasion out of a day that seemed to hold great significance to humans. He somehow doubted if Kirk remembered that it was Christmas Eve on Earth. Suddenly it became important to him that he have something for Kirk to come back to instead of just an empty, lonely room.



"You wish to purchase a tree?" The look on the man's face clearly showed that he thought Spock had taken leave of his senses.

"That is correct. I wish one that is living, preferably green and approximately two feet in height."

"Look, buddy, trees aren't exactly in my line..."

"But you can sell me one."

"Well, yeah, I guess so."

Spock received very odd looks as he made his way back to Federation Headquarters with the small tree under his arm, the roots wrapped in a wet cloth and various parcels full of decorations in his hands. But he paid no attention, his mind busy on his task.





Kirk sat alone in the conference room, his mind refusing to accept what had happened. The Andorians had stormed out despite his desperate efforts to stop them. He knew if he went personally to the ambassador he would be able to talk him into coming back, but he just didn't have the energy. The morning would do just as well.

His mind turned to Spock, to the incredible feeling of love and protection he had felt when he had awakened earlier cradled in the strength of the Vulcan's arms. Spock understood as no other man ever could what he was going through. He offered his love and concern and suddenly Kirk wanted to be with him. He gathered what little remaining strength he had and left for their rooms.



Spock was standing by the small tree when Kirk came in. The delicate lights twinkled on its branches, slender alien ornaments sparkled in the lights, tiny bells sounding as the heat from the lights caused them to gently collide with each other.

Kirk stood frozen in the doorway. For an instant, he was transported to a far away planet and another time. His eyes finally left the tree to rest on Spock, who silently stepped forward.

"Merry Christmas, Jim."

He knew he was crying. He could feel the tears running down his face and he couldn't stop them. Almost instantly Spock was there, strong arms surrounding him, hugging him close.

"Jim, what's wrong?"

He couldn't speak. He shook his head in futility. He held Spock tightly and rested his head on the Vulcan's shoulder until finally the tears stopped. Spock stood gently rocking Kirk in his encircling arms, talking soothingly. Finally Kirk managed to regain control and gently freed himself from Spock's arms, although he didn't let go of his hands.

"Spock," he said, his voice choked with emotion. "All day I have been struggling with unreasonable, violent emotions. I thought mankind had sunk lower than I had thought it possible to sink and then, when I desperately needed you, my friend, you answered my unspoken cry like this. . . ."



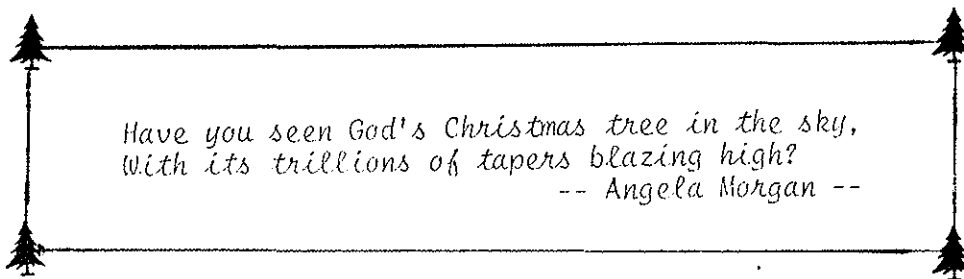


Spock's brown eyes were dangerously full as a tiny smile touched his face. "Your cry was not as silent as you think, Jim. And man has not sunk as low as you may believe. You, after all, still exist. . . "

A small smile touched Kirk's eyes. "As do you, my friend." His eyes turned to the tree. "And so does this -- a living symbol of something that somehow seems to bring out the best in all of us."

They sat for a long time in silence, side by side, watching the twinkling lights. Finally Kirk fell asleep. Spock put an arm around his shoulder and pulled the human close. The soft, silky hair was mussed and had fallen forward over Kirk's face, the face as innocent as that new born baby of the legends.

"Sleep well, my friend," said Spock softly. "The tree and I shall always be here when you wake."





## *Giving Season*

My thoughts are filled with  
Images of  
Cold snow,  
Warm fires,  
Holly, trees  
And mistletoe.  
But those things are far away,  
Locked in memory albums  
Of once-at-home  
And long ago.  
Here,  
The cold's locked safely outside,  
Life support systems keep us warm  
And alien flora vies for our attention  
Amongst the beauty of more familiar forms.  
We're far away from home,  
Both in space and time  
And what day it is really doesn't matter.  
Still, once a year  
There comes a season,  
A time to give,  
A time for joy.  
A season for love and  
Traditions mingled with holy beliefs.  
It's part of my heritage, my soul.  
Man's alone out here.  
We still need reasons,  
Still need someone standing by our side...  
I want to share with you,  
Build snowmen,  
Wrap presents,  
Trim a tree.  
Come on, since we're flying out here  
Through the middle of nowhere,  
Let's go up together  
To the Observation Deck.

It's the season for following a star.

-- Martha J. Bonds --

# SOMETHING SPECIAL

**Crystal Ann Taylor**

There was a round of applause and much shouting when the new constitution was unveiled. A new day had dawned and although there was still much work to be done, two years ago no one would have given odds that even this much could be accomplished. The Empire had been overthrown. What had once seemed impossible was now a fact, achieved with the aid of two men who waited nearby to be honored for their participation.

Spock glanced with pride at the man who stood beside him. Without his Captain, none of this would have been possible. It had not been an easy two years - there had been many disappointments and sacrifices for a man who didn't care if faith could move mountains. But in the final analysis, that man had helped to forge a new world.

Spock remembered how difficult it had been to convince Kirk to join him. It had been his first task, and in some ways, his hardest one, but it had been a necessary one. For without Kirk, he would do nothing. He could cloak it in impressive terminology - of logic, smooth and efficient teamwork - but in truth, he had given Kirk a personal loyalty and protection that he had not understood until he had come face to face with that other Kirk. That Kirk had shown him a buried core in his own Captain that would have been tapped if the parameters of the universe had been different. Indeed, Spock had glimpsed that soul on occasion, but only briefly before it was squashed by necessity.

He could not fault the Human for accepting the world the way it was, for hadn't he himself done the same thing all his life? Hadn't he helped promote the Empire, even though he had known it was not the best use of man's potential?

Spock thought it ironic that it had taken a Kirk to show him where his duty lie. Which was worse - to participate so you can bend a world to your own liking or to watch on the sidelines because you fear you don't have the strength to change it? Above all, Kirk was a survivor, a pragmatic individual who cared less for the fate of the universe than his role in it. And when Spock had decided to heed that other Kirk's words...

The Vulcan sighed. His Kirk had been suspicious of his admiration for that other one. In fact, Kirk had stubbornly refused to listen to logic once he had realized just who had convinced Spock to attempt the change. Kirk had laughed at his plans, listed all the reasons why the Empire would succeed against his insanity, called him myriad names from fool to unrepeatable ones, and in the end, indicated with that gleam in his eye that he had accepted the challenge. The challenge - the impossible odds - that was what had finally swayed Kirk. His Captain had never been one to walk away from something because it was difficult; he thrived on such situations and sometimes, Spock almost believed, actually looked for them. With Kirk leading, they had made an invincible team - a team that was partially responsible for today.

Spock let his gaze travel across the room. The shouts of joy had faded into respectful silence as the speaker told the story of their spectacular victory.

However, to the Vulcan who had found some answers to his own identity, the political accomplishments almost seemed to pale against the personal ones. In the last two years, Kirk had mellowed from the incomprehensible, self-centered man to one more open and reachable. And with him, Spock himself had grown. Circumstances, he had reflected, had done much to generate this: when you are two against the world...

He looked at his companion and noticed the frown in the hazel eyes. The tightened jaw and unnatural rigidity disquieted the Vulcan. There was only one thing that was capable of marring this day for Kirk - the one sacrifice he had had to make in order to bring about this day. For nothing the Coalition had been able to offer had the regal elegance and ultimate power of Starfleet's finest.

Kirk was indeed thinking about the Enterprise; the pain of her loss was still real to him - in some ways more important than the pomp and ceremony in front of him. He had never thought they would make it; he had often wondered why he had thrown his life in with a seemingly hopeless cause when he didn't care who ruled the skies as long as he had his ship to command. No, that wasn't precisely true: if it had been only a choice between the Enterprise and Spock, why would he have chosen the Vulcan? He, too, had believed that Spock's way was right or he wouldn't have chosen to join a coalition of rebels. He had grown tired of slaughtering sheep because they dared to defy the Empire. Secretly, he had always admired the underdogs with the courage to fight back; they were the real strong ones, the brave ones, the stuff of which heroes were made. It had been an exciting two years, creating a crew out of those idealists, pitting them against the strength of the Empire, and winning. It had been a test of his talent and ingenuity to take them against the mighty starships. And now they had accomplished their goal, and what was left for him? He had refused an appointment to the new Admiralty because he didn't want to be tied to a chair in an office somewhere. However, a part of him had died when he had heard of the loss of the Enterprise, and now he wasn't so sure he wanted to forge new frontiers. Still, the new ranks and assignments would

be coming through soon...

"Captain Kirk." The voice from the podium returned him to the present. He stepped up as the man continued. "The Coalition would like to give you this medal in acknowledgement of your heroism. It is men like you..."

Spock listened to the litany of praise but his eyes were on the regal figure of his Captain who now stood at proud attention as he received the medal. "Capable of carving universes" was not just rhetoric to the Vulcan as he watched the hazel eyes sparkle and the lips turn up in an embarrassed smile. He wondered if the people here today realized that none of this would have been possible if Kirk had not chosen this path as their future, had not sacrificed what was important to him personally to bring about one Vulcan's vision of justice. A warm glow encompassed Spock and he decided that there had to be a special way to show Kirk his gratitude. Something unique that he could give to him that would equalize what Kirk had given him - today, yesterday, and for all tomorrow.

Spock knew that he had considerable power with the new Council; in fact, in a sense he had created it. Between that and the power Kirk had with the new Admiralty, they could probably get anything they wanted. Kirk might be uncertain as to what he wanted, but Spock had no doubts about what Kirk needed. And he knew the perfect environment. Ever since he had seen it in that other Doctor's mind, he had planned to take Kirk there. It was a place in that alternate universe, but if it existed there, it had to have its counterpart here. All he had had to do was find it and he had spent most of his free time searching for it. Now would be the most appropriate time to explore his new discovery, he thought, as he heard his own name called. There would be general leave time after this celebration and there would soon be some ancient Terran holidays that he could use to his advantage. He resolved to make all the necessary arrangements as he stepped toward the podium.



When Spock had what he wanted from the new Admiralty and the Council, he put his plan into action. He booked passage for the two of them and hired a small private ship for the last leg of the journey.

Once again, Kirk was not the easiest man to convince.

"Spock, there's been too many long, lonely nights on this damned crusade of yours," Kirk complained, haphazardly tossing the chess pieces back in their case. "Nights with nothing to do but plan ah... unusual things to do on this leave. I want to do a little hell-raising." He closed the case with a bang. "Why the hell should I give it up to go traipsing off with you when you won't even tell me where you want

to go?"

"I thought your curiosity might -- "

"Not good enough, Mr. Spock." His look demanded details.

Spock, however, could be as stubborn as the Human in front of him. "Then, Captain, consider the old Terran holiday which is approaching, where it is customary -- "

"You mean Christmas?" Kirk cut in with a bitter laugh. "All Christmas ever meant to me was a cold month, endless parties with relatives who didn't know you existed the rest of the year, and time off. Christmas means nothing to me."

"I regret you feel that way," Spock replied with a mock show of resignation. "In that case, you would not be interested in the present I have for you."

"A present?" The unexpected words stopped him and he brightened momentarily like a child. "Wha...?" Embarrassed, he turned away and shrugged. "No one gives presents anymore, Spock. Why should you?"

"Captain, we are attempting to create a new future. Now is the time to blend the best of the past with the hope of the present. Any custom that stands for cooperation and brotherhood should not be discarded lightly." Spock had planned his strategy with full knowledge of his recalcitrant; it was only a question of time before Kirk would concede.

Kirk was silent, recognizing that Spock had come prepared with his arguments. Compelling curiosity overcame his resistance and he turned toward the Vulcan, expectant, offering attention.

Spock read the look written on the expressive features, but he purposely waited until Kirk demanded impatiently, "Well, go on. Where is it? What is it?"

"It is a place, Captain. A planet where no man in this universe has been." A statement like that invited questions, but, unfortunately, Spock knew of no other way to interest the Human. "I want to show it to you before the rest of your illogical race becomes intrigued with it and manages to despoil it."

"You have a lot of confidence in us, don't you? Where is this planet of yours?" Kirk persisted. "And what's so special about it?"

"If I told you that, it would not be much of a surprise for you, would it?"

"I don't like surprises, Spock. Besides, if no one has ever been there before, how do you know of it?"

That was the one question the Vulcan would not be bullied into answering. Spock changed tactics. "Where's your sense of adventure, Captain? Trust me."

"Last time I trusted you, I ended up with a crew of idealists and half of Starfleet after my ass."

"But it was worth it, wasn't it?"

"Humph!" Kirk looked penetratingly at his First Officer. He had an idea where Spock's surprise came from and he wasn't sure he wanted that suspicion verified. That encounter was still a wound - never healed because of and in spite of the changes for which it had been responsible. All this time and he still felt the spectre standing over him, watching, waiting. He resented it. He was uneasy about comparison, illogical though that was. But he was also intrigued with the Vulcan's mystery. Ever since he had returned from the mirror universe, he and Spock had grown closer. The Vulcan seemed to constantly hover over him. At first he had found it suffocating and annoying; later it became comforting and reassuring. To be able to rely on someone... trust someone... Sometimes it frightened Kirk. Above all else, he didn't want to be vulnerable.

"All right, Spock. No more questions. But this better be good. I had some interesting plans for my leave."

"I assure you," Spock said with relief, "you will enjoy it."



Spock landed the ship near the lake and followed Kirk outside. Kirk whistled as the sheer beauty of the place struck him. The lake was deep blue and serene. The vegetation was lush and rustling softly in the breeze. Quiet pervaded the air and a cool peace settled over Kirk.

He began walking, eyes exploring his surroundings. "What is this place, Spock?"

"It is a planet where anything you imagine can become real. Whomever you wish to meet again will come alive before your eyes. Whatever you wish to do is possible. Or so I was informed."

Kirk looked at him incredulously. "You've got to be kidding."

"Vulcans never joke. You could visit with your family. Spend time with old friends -- "

"Are you telling me I can conjure up anything I want and it will appear just like that? You must be out of your mind. It's impossible."

"I assure you, it is very real. But I must warn you to keep your mind on pleasant experiences. There is real danger in power games and life and death struggles. I do not know how closely this world parallels its counterpart."

Kirk was silent. His jaw tightened in resentment. "So you did learn about this place from him." Anger ignited, he threatened, "I ought to bring alive -- "

"Don't, Captain," Spock interrupted hurriedly, worried by the hard brown eyes.

Kirk ignored him, pursed his lips, and stared at the horizon.

Suddenly bitter at the easy vindictiveness of the Human, Spock warned, "Two can play at that game and it would do neither of us any good."

After a few minutes, a blue-clad figure emerged from the trees, wandering toward them in the slowness of investigation. He was just as Kirk remembered - upswept eyebrows, dark hair, gentle features, no beard. A cruel smile lit the Captain's lips in anticipation, until he heard the sound of his own voice, calling softly and affectionately from nearby.

"Spock. Spock - where are you?"

Shaken, Kirk stepped back behind the bushes near him.

The vision turned toward the sound and called, "Here, Captain." Even his voice seemed gentle.

Another figure emerged from the trees - this time in gold. He strolled leisurely toward his companion, a grin animating his face. "Don't you ever stop working, Spock? It's a beautiful day and a lovely planet. Can't you just enjoy it?"

"I am *enjoying* it, Captain," the Vulcan replied with a hint of amusement.

"Meandering around with your tricorder? Yes, I guess you are. But we don't often get a chance to come to worlds like this. Can't you think of anything else to do in such a gorgeous landscape? Something you wouldn't mind sharing with your poor beleaguered Captain who is -- "

"In need of a rest after single-handedly defending the universe? Specifically, what did you have in mind, Captain?" One eyebrow rose in innocent inquiry. "Please bear in mind that I am a Vulcan and not subject to any of your idiosyncracies."

Kirk laughed. "Don't tempt you, Spock." He squeezed Spock's arm briefly before gazing toward the lake. "It's so peaceful here."



No duties. No command decisions." He stretched and turned to his friend. "All right, I'll make a deal with you. I'll help you collect your data and for starters, you'll go swimming with me."

"Jim," Spock answered in what seemed like a groan. "Vulcans are not -- "

"Are you trying to say Vulcans don't like water, Spock?" Kirk teased, giving Spock a playful nudge. "Not surprising," he commented, but continued before Spock could protest. "You can practice your bouyancy factors and hydrostatic pressures if you prefer. Rediscover Archimedes' principle. In any case -- "

"In any case, science first," Spock retorted, punching Kirk in the stomach with the tricorder. "And if there is any *luck* at all, you'll forget your mad scheme."

"Not likely, Mr. Spock," he called over his shoulder as he activated the tricorder. "You know what we mad Captains are like when we have our minds set on something."

Kirk glanced from the scene in front of him to glare at his own First Officer. Spock calmly returned the look with one that clearly indicated just who was responsible for what was happening nearby. Kirk was ready to make a scathing remark when he realized that the voices were coming closer. Involuntarily his eyes returned to the scene before him.

"Spock, it's been a long time since I visited Earth," said the relaxed, friendly voice. "I've been thinking that perhaps I could go home on my next leave. I'd like you to come with me. My mother would be pleased to meet you. She'd like you and you'd..."

Kirk's eyes hardened and he stopped listening. His lips drew into a thin line and he stalked away with clenched fists. Spock followed him immediately, concerned that the situation had gone too far. "Captain?"

Kirk sat down on a nearby rock. He didn't respond to the inquiry. In fact, he didn't seem aware of the Vulcan standing beside him. The expression in his eyes was distant. "Family, Spock," he finally whispered. "I..." he paused, letting the rest hang in the air. Was there anything that his counterpart did not have? As if aware of his vulnerability, Kirk stiffened. "I don't want to think about them," he said firmly. His eyes glistened as he continued, "I have a much better fantasy for us, Spock." He became quiet, as if concentrating.

The cunning gleam in the hazel eyes made Spock uneasy. Kirk's mind could be so devious at times and Spock sensed that he wouldn't like what Kirk was now contemplating.

Kirk caught his expression and laughed, but there was an unpleasant undercurrent in its tone. "Come on, Vulcan. I'm sure we'll find it

around the next bend." He stood up and started off, giving Spock no choice but to follow him.

It was indeed around the next bend and it brought Spock to a full stop. The building was a gaudy mish-mash of stone, color, and fancy iron-railing. Red drapes could be seen inside the windows. From the interior came the sounds of raucous laughter. Spock groaned inwardly. He should have known that Kirk would think of something like this. A bordello was not exactly what he had had in mind and he tried to think of adequate excuses to extricate himself.

"Not this time, Mister," came the answer firmly beside him, a hint of hard determination in it.

"You would surely have a more rewarding experience if you went in alone. Vulcans are not in the habit of --"

"Come on." Kirk gave him a nudge in the direction of the building. Reluctantly Spock followed him up the stairs.

The entryway provided a partial refuge for the two men while they surveyed the interior. Although the room was dim with smoke haze, the scattered tables were quite visible, bodies moving in discordant patterns around them. The low drone of multiple voices permeated the air which was thick with the aroma of candles, wine, and burnt offerings.

There were men and women laughing and nuzzling each other. Some were embracing; others were moving in sensuous dances of their own making. Various couples clung so tight it was difficult to tell one from the other. Many were barely visible against the huge, fluffy pillows; others seemed to revel in exposure.

Along one side of the room ran a bar at which several women in low-cut, semi-transparent, loosely-fitted garments sat, boredom written into every gesture. A few turned toward the new arrivals, appraising them with interest.

When one tried to catch Kirk's eye, he glanced surreptitiously at Spock. The distaste was written so clearly on the Vulcan features that Kirk smiled in satisfaction.

"Ah, come on in, my fine young men." A heavily-perfumed matronly woman appeared in front of them. She leaned into them as she continued. "Don't be shy. Make yourself at home." She grabbed each by the arm with the intention of leading them inside.

Spock didn't move. "Don't you have more private rooms for your guests?" he inquired, trying to ignore Kirk's amused grin.

"So soon?" she asked in surprise. "Wouldn't you... " The question died as she noticed the hard, fierce look in the dark eyes. "We do have some rooms reserved for our special customers, but..." A shudder of

fear ran through her as she realized that this Vulcan was not to be tangled with, not to be teased, not to be denied. "This way, gentlemen," she finished tersely.

Kirk winked and mocked in a low voice that only the Vulcan could hear, "So soon, Spock?"

"Would you rather be on stage, Captain?" Spock shot back, equally quiet.

The woman led them to a jarringly garish room filled with huge cushions on the floor, a table lit with candles, and doors that left no doubt as to where they led.

"Please be seated. I'll see you get some refreshments."

Spock waited until she left to complain. "Really, Captain, with all your vast experience, could you not come up with a better place than this?"

Kirk flashed a wicked grin and raised an eyebrow in a mocking imitation. "Don't you like it? I chose it especially for you. I wanted to give you the benefit of the full experience, Spock. Something to tell your grandchildren about when you're old and gray."

The opportunity to answer was lost with the return of the woman, accompanied by several half-dressed young women, each bearing a tray or bottle in her hands. After placing everything on the low table, the group divided to surround each man.

Spock hurriedly slid out of the path of a blonde who tried to sit on top of him. She hit the floor with a surprised yelp as both cushion and Vulcan tilted away from her.

Kirk chuckled and admonished, "Spock, you aren't getting into the spirit of things. Don't you want to have fun? Come here, you lovely darling," he said as he drew a voluptuous redhead into his lap.

The others positioned themselves around the two officers. One began to fill glasses with sparkling green liquid. She handed one to Kirk and offered another to Spock. The Vulcan declined with a shake of his head as he tried to remove the hands massaging his neck muscles.

"Captain, I really think I've had enough -- young lady!" Spock firmly pushed the questing hand away.

"It was your idea to come to this planet. I thought you wanted me to enjoy myself."

"That was my intention. However -- "

"Then shut up and be friendly." Kirk embraced the redhead and kissed her as a demonstration of what he meant.

Spock regretted his decision to come to this planet, although the result was essentially his own fault. He should have expected Kirk to choose something like this, considering the number of women who had visited the Captain's quarters over the years. In many ways, this Human was quite predictable.

Spock resigned himself to the inevitable. Until his Captain was happily occupied for the night, he would not be free to leave. He firmly ordered his pretty companions to behave themselves, telling them that he'd make his selection for the night based on the concept of who acted most adult and who could best stimulate his intellect. His unusual words quieted down the females as each tried to speculate just what this odd man would have her do if she should be the one selected.

Spock made a show of eating dinner, while he watched the antics of his Captain with what he told himself was scientific detachment. One girl was massaging Kirk's shoulders, while another was attempting to feed him.

Kirk caught the Vulcan's eye and commented, "You're right about this place, Spock. It's going to become a very popular planet."

Spock watched as Kirk's hands became more outrageous in their explorations. Kirk's voice was lightly teasing and his face was animated with appreciation and humor. Feminine giggling accompanied the inane remarks Kirk made.

Without knowing why, Spock felt that Kirk was putting on an elaborate act, directed toward him with the sole purpose of annoying him. The scene was too pat, too intimate, too obvious. It was as if the Human were only too aware of Spock's unease and was capitalizing on it.

Nevertheless, the Vulcan *was* uncomfortable and he resented Kirk for it.

When Kirk wound up in a sensuous wrestling match, Spock decided he had had enough and grabbed the nearest girl and pulled her to him. He began to caress her hair, her neck, her shoulders.

As he became aware of what Spock was doing, Kirk sat up abruptly, shaking off the feminine hands that continued to stroke him. For a moment he remained motionless, staring at the Vulcan. Then he scowled at Spock, reached for the redhead's hand. He stood, drawing her up with him and headed toward the nearest door.

As soon as Kirk disappeared from sight, Spock dropped his hands

to his sides, relieved. He dismissed the group amid much protest, quieted the matron with arguments and promises of reward, and retired alone to an inner room to await the dawn.



Spock entered the room and approached the bed. Kirk lie sprawled asleep, alone, his body twisted in the sheet, his face half-buried in the pillows. One arm lay hidden under them, the other was thrown carelessly above his head. With his broad, muscled back bared to the morning light, his golden skin, and tousled hair, Kirk reminded Spock of the pagan gods his mother's ancestors had worshipped.

Spock called his name, but Kirk didn't wake at the sound. Instead, he mumbled something unintelligible and turned away, giving Spock a good idea how much alcohol he had imbibed last night: Kirk was usually instantly awake.

"Captain," he repeated, as he leaned over to touch Kirk's shoulder. Kirk murmured, smiled, and stretched with languid splendor as he reached for the comforting hand. He groggily came awake when the visitor resisted being pulled into his arms.

When he realized who was standing near him, Kirk flushed and sat up suddenly. As his head began to pound mercilessly, he soon forgot his embarrassment and dropped back onto the pillows with a moan. "Oh, I think I overdid it last night," he groaned and opened his eyes to read the amused expression on the Vulcan's countenance. "You needn't stand there with that smug delight written all over your face - what the hell do you want, anyway?"

"We should be on our way, unless you wish to spend the rest of your leave here. You may, if you choose, since the object is to fulfill your desires, but I have seen as much of this place as I care to."

Kirk frowned at him and then grimaced at the gesture. "I think I've seen enough of it, too. Get out of here and see if you can scrounge up something for my head." As the Vulcan turned toward the door, Kirk added, "Besides, I'm curious to see just what sort of entertainment was on your mind."

"I did have some ideas, Captain," Spock conceded as he left.

When Spock returned, Kirk was dressed and leaning against the bedpost. Straightening at the sound of the Vulcan's footsteps, Kirk took the proffered cup with a grimace, his movements slow and awkward.

Seeing Kirk attempt to hide his obvious discomfort made the Vulcan relent.

"I could ease the pain with a Vulcan mind-touch if you wish. The contact is quite superficial. There is no need to let last night interfere with today."

For a moment Kirk considered it, but he disliked giving Spock free rein to his mind. He was never quite sure... "No. I'm all right. I..."

Spock saw the hesitation and brushed the Captain's face lightly with his fingers, setting them into position when Kirk didn't pull away.

"You're a handy man to have around, Spock," Kirk said when Spock finished, a soft gratitude lighting his eyes for a moment before he turned away to inspect the room for the first time. *This really was a rotten image to create*, he thought. *Why do you ever put up with me? If only you wouldn't make me so damned angry...* He noticed that Spock was watching him so he said aloud, "I'm all right, now. I think we'd better be going."

Spock nodded and followed him out.

Kirk wanted to apologize but outside, in the sunlight, the moment passed and he was no longer willing to discuss the previous night.



They came upon a body of water large enough to be an ocean. In it, near the shore, rocked a ship whose styling had not been seen for many centuries. She had the elegance of the old clipper ships with her long, sharp bow flaring outward as it rose above the water, but she was smaller than a schooner, as if in anticipation of a smaller crew. Still, three masts rose tall and majestic in the morning light, heavily rigged with sails lashed tight in preparation. Her mast-heads and yards were black, her lower masts white. The harmony of her outline projected her beauty. Dark and sleek, she spoke of power, of slicing through the waves with the foam rushing past in rounded crests of hills and valleys, of cutting the air with the wind slave to her wishes.

*In full sail, she must be a handsome vessel*, Kirk thought as his eyes travelled in appreciation the stout rigging, neatly fitted. *And fast. She looks like she's built for lightness and speed.*

Kirk was caught by her beauty and catapulted through time, back to the little boy who read and dreamed of such things - frigates and sloops that sailed the oceans and starships that sailed the skies. The excitement of the unknown had always been there; the sense of immense power under your control. A meeting with destiny. A chance for heroism. A crew that followed your wishes.

The look of hunger in the hazel eyes satisfied the Vulcan. "It is specially constructed to fit our needs," he explained. "There is a computer on board that is completely capable of handling the ship, thus eliminating the need for the crew we do not have. However, it is also designed to respond to manual handling, so you may do as much of the actual sailing as you desire." Spock paused to wait for Kirk's reaction.

None came. Kirk stood staring at the vessel as if mesmerized by the vision. He guessed that this project had taken Spock considerable time to design, that it was not the product of a fleeting wish, and that Spock had known what he wanted long before he came to this planet. The thought moved him, yet he was unable to express how it touched him.

"I modeled her after the *Champion of the Seas*, a vessel employed in the Australian trade lines of nineteenth century Earth, with considerable modification, of course. This one is much smaller than the original."

"It's large enough," Kirk answered, rousing himself. "Come on. Let's go test her out."

He and Spock climbed into the tiny boat that waited on the beach and motored out to the ship.

Kirk caught his breath when the wind filled and stretched the great canvas sails, bringing the vessel surging to life. She even carried royals like an ancient ship of war, making the harmony of her masts and yards complete. Against the sky she was a perfect picture, and Kirk knew that the man who had captained the original must have been a proud man indeed.

The day passed all too quickly as the ship drove through the water under full sail. Her canvas billowed in the wind as if she owned the sea. On board, two men felt the sting of the wind as she glided through the water and tasted the spray of the cold wetness as she conquered the ocean.

As darkness approached, Spock sighted an island. Kirk was inclined to ignore it and remain aboard the ship, for the delight of feeling its deck sway beneath his feet could not be worn off in a day. Even the promise to return had not dissuaded him from the desire to sleep in her rocking arms, but Spock insisted on going ashore.

Kirk felt too mellow to resist. Besides, he was quite tired from scrambling up the masts to adjust the sails as he'd seen in tapes, fighting with the wheel as the ship battled with him for control, and from the many little things that had made that day one of pure pleasure. It had left him in tune with his surroundings; he felt closer to his companion, and it made him agreeable to almost anything.

After they reached the shore, landed, and secured the small craft, Kirk turned again toward the sleek vessel, black against the gathering darkness. "You have very nice fantasies, Mr. Spock," he said, gazing at her. A vision of her construction was still in his mind. She had looked as if her frame had really been made of seasoned white oak, her planking and ceiling of hard pine, and her keel of rock maple.

Spock did not answer the wistful tone. Instead, he led the way toward the cabin he knew would be there.

The warmth and familiarity born of the day's togetherness was still with them later when they lounged around the fireplace. The glow of the fire added to the intimacy and encouraged conversation.

"Tell me about Vulcan, Spock," Kirk invited softly. "Tell me what it was like growing up there. Did you have any close friends?"

Spock's usual instinct was to give a bland reply but the aura of the night had fractured his barriers, leaving a desire to reach out and a need to be understood. He glanced at the shadows that flickered across his Captain's face, noticing the unguarded openness in his expression. "In some areas, my childhood on Vulcan was atypical," Spock offered hesitantly. "Full Vulcans can be insensitive to the needs of one... different from themselves. Children, like in any culture, can lack... compassion."

It was a tentative beginning but Kirk nodded in understanding. "Knock-down fights and stubborn determination. I know the feeling well. I was pretty good with my fists myself. At least..." His voice hardened as he continued, "... you didn't have an older brother to contend with."

"Being an only child can be lonely."

"Sometimes it can be just as lonely with a brother." Kirk fell silent, reliving a past with a mother who was always comparing her two sons - a mother whose pride in the accomplishments of her first-born left no patience for the spiritedness of her youngest.

"Jimmy. Jimmy - where are you?" a voice called from outside the cabin.

Kirk jumped at the sound and hurried to the door. Stepping outside, he saw his mother turn to Sam. "Where is that brother of yours?" she complained. "Why don't you keep a closer watch on him? He's always wandering off when I need him."

Without thinking, Kirk started toward them. "Mom."

"There you are. 'Bout time, I should say. Where've you been? I can never keep track of you. Why can't you be more like your brother?"



Kirk paled as all the old hurts resurfaced and he turned away.

"Where are you going?" the feminine voice called, but Kirk no longer listened.

Spock grabbed the Human's arm as Kirk tried to pass him.

"Let go," Kirk grated. "Damn you, Spock! You son-of-a-bitch! Why the hell did you have to discover this place? Why couldn't you leave things alone?"

Spock released his grip under the barrage of Kirk's anger.

"That's it, isn't it?" Kirk added, attempting to inflict on the Vulcan the wounds he felt. "You can't control things as they are, so you insist on changing them. You can't be full-Vulcan because you're half-Human, so you try to change the rest of us. You're no better than she is..." Anger evolved into resentment as Kirk read the expression in Spock's eyes. "Tell me, Spock, if you're so unhappy with our universe, why don't you leave?"

Kirk didn't wait for an answer; he started off into the night. All he could think of was the need to escape, to run away from the past and the spectre of the unknown alternate he could have been. He had to rebuild the shields he felt crumbling around him.

"Jim..."

There was no response from Kirk, no slowing of his pace.

"Captain."

At that, Kirk did stop and turn. "Captain?" he repeated and laughed bitterly. "Are you sure?" Then he turned away and stalked off into the cold night.

Spock stared as the darkness swallowed him. *Yes, you are my Captain and always will be...* He sighed at the pain in the thought.



The air chilled Kirk, but he didn't care. His anger kept him warm. Above, the stars beckoned with a seductive lure. He wasn't interested in the image Spock painted, he told himself. He wanted his universe. Reality. He need not apologize for it because it didn't fit Vulcan ethics. It was so easy to say: if you don't like it as it is, remold it - if it isn't logical, reconstruct it. But it had been a foolish thought. He doubted whether the universe had been truly reshaped by their actions; more likely only the leaders had been changed. Empires

could be built and crushed, but it was always by man's strength, not his compassion. That quality wasn't a viable commodity in his world. He didn't need it. It was his strength and ingenuity that gave him his triumphs. He had done quite well for himself and he need not apologize for his universe or for himself. The past was dead and he did not want to be other than he was...

The stars - there was no pain in them. He should return to them, far away from the Vulcan who wanted to change him.

Christmas. Why dredge up that old holiday? Friendship and warmth - those were concepts associated with the Terran occasion, but too often it had meant hurt to the lonely child whose humanity was torn apart in the cold survival of the streets. He had learned quickly the way of the world. The facade of warmth disguised how men used each other. Bought and sold. Everyone had a price, you just had to find the right one. But what was the price of this Vulcan?

He had never understood Spock's loyalty, his support. He had accepted it, used it, but never quite trusted in it. Spock had more to gain by opposing him, yet he had always stood by Kirk's side. What was it that kept the Vulcan there? Lack of ambition didn't seem to be the answer, because the Vulcan showed a remarkable stubbornness when pursuing what he wanted. What made Spock stand behind him when any other First Officer would be his deadly rival? Not knowing made him uneasy.

Kirk wanted to know what held Spock; he needed that edge. He didn't want to lose the Vulcan's support. He could conquer the stars by himself if need be, but they were cold, devoid of life, lonely. Like the women he had known, the stars were alluring, but they were empty as love had always been for him. Without someone to share, there was no glory in triumph.

There might be loneliness in the stars, he reflected, but one thing he knew for certain: as long as Spock was with him, he wasn't alone. He could draw comfort from that knowledge.

He recognized that this was part of the answer. Spock understood isolation. In that they were kindred spirits. And there were other things, things he hadn't wanted to admit because acknowledgement made him feel too vulnerable.

Kirk smiled. Perhaps it was time to admit that he needed Spock, to acknowledge that he trusted Spock enough to care about the Vulcan. He did have faith in Spock. There was a time when he relied on no one but himself, but Spock had shown him that he could count on the Vulcan. As a result, he had grown to depend on him - for reinforcement, for confidence, for companionship.

He might not have been sanguine about Spock's crusade, but he had been touched that Spock had entrusted him with his vision, had insisted on having him with him. Together they shared that dream, worked side by side for that reality, shed blood together. That bound them closer than any superficial word or role.

Spock had said that he could have anything he desired here... but he did not know what he wanted.

He wondered if it were possible to have a friendship like the one that apparently existed in that alternate universe. It frightened him yet enticed him, and he wished he'd had more of an opportunity to see it in action.

Alone with the stars, Kirk finally admitted that he needed that friendship, wanted it very much.

He had done his very best to destroy it.

This was truly a beautiful place and it was Spock's gift to him. He had no right to be unappreciative; it showed that Spock had been trying... trying for the past two years, for that matter. Perhaps it was time for Kirk to take a step.

He would do something to make it up to the Vulcan in the morning. After all, tomorrow was Christmas...



"Spock." Kirk called from the doorway.

The Vulcan awoke immediately and sat up.

"Come on, get up. I want your opinion on something."

Kirk didn't see the eyebrow that rose in listless indifference. After the previous evening, Spock was no longer interested in the plans he had made. He wanted only to admit that it had been a mistake and to end it as soon as possible. He looked forward to returning to the Coalition and his duties. Perhaps then he could begin to reconstruct the necessary control that he had been dangerously close to losing here.

When the Vulcan entered the outer room, he was surprised by the transformation. The room sparkled with red and green decorations. In the center stood a blue spruce tree, dripping with silver icicles and flashing with lights. It was a vision out of all the Terran nursery books he had read when his father wasn't looking.

The windows seemed to reveal a landscape of white, as if the ground around them had been changed into a winter paradise. Spock had no desire to look any closer and possibly break the illusion.

The table was set for a festive occasion: multicolored delicacies, cakes, breakfast rolls, steaming coffee, and an intricately designed decanter set placed on a red and green cloth.

If it hadn't been morning, Spock would have expected the candles to be lit. There was a warm fire in the fireplace, and...

"Well?"

Spock looked at Kirk with interest. The Human stood near the table, trying to conceal the look of expectancy on his face.

"Why, Captain?" Spock inquired. "After last night..."

Kirk didn't answer immediately. Instead, he moved to the table, poured two glasses of red liquid and handed one to Spock. "Here, drink this. There's no alcohol in it." He traced the rim of his own glass with his finger to avoid eye contact and said softly, "I wanted to make up for last night... to say I'm sorry... to say that you're more... family than I've ever had... closer... than anyone I've ever known." As he finished, he looked up at Spock.

Spock didn't reply for a long moment, allowing the silence to dissipate some of the intimacy. Finally he said, "There is only one thing missing."

Kirk's eyes questioned him, but Spock didn't elaborate, although there was a touch of a smile on his lips.

"HO! HO! HO! Anyone home?" came a voice from outside. A moment later, a fat little man with a large fluffy white beard dressed in a too-tight red suit appeared in the doorway. Kirk couldn't help but laugh as he watched the man struggle with the lopsided sack. "Sorry I'm late. I should have been here while you slept, but there's so much to do." He gave up trying to drag the sack into the room. He sidled up to Kirk. "Have you been good lately?" he asked, staring pointedly at him. "Well, no matter. Can't ask for miracles these days, can I? Here, this is for you." He shoved an object into Kirk's hands with little fanfare and turned toward the door.

"Well, I must be going. Millions of presents to deliver and only two little hands and two little feet, you know." He chuckled and scurried out of the cabin. "Merry Christmas," he called over his shoulder.

When Kirk realized that he held a tiny ship in his hands, he sat down abruptly on the couch.

"The Council wanted to show their appreciation and since you rejected their first offer..." Spock sat down next to his Captain. "This is no illusion, Jim. This is real. I talked them into letting me present it to you this way."

"Yes, I know." He stared at the model Enterprise in his hand to hide the tears in his eyes, and toyed with its sleek lines, searching for something to say.

"She has been totally rebuilt and refitted with the latest technology. A new crew. A new mission. But in need of an experienced hand at the con."

Both were quiet. Kirk fingered the little model absently while Spock watched him.

"What do you ever see in me?" Kirk murmured without looking up.

"Sunlight and shadow," Spock commented. When Kirk turned to him with a quizzical look, Spock hitched an innocent eyebrow and added, "god of the stars, carver of universes, wielder of firebolts, master --"

"Enough, Spock," Kirk laughed. "What the hell kind of description is that?"

"Mighty warrior, errant king --"

"*Spock!*" He slapped the Vulcan in the stomach.

"And perhaps..."

The hazel eyes met his.

"Something special... a friend."

Kirk smiled, the warmth of the room reflected in his eyes. "This really is a nice planet. Do you think it would be possible to start over?"

"Indeed, I did have a few ideas in mind that we haven't explored yet. However, time is running out."

Kirk grinned. He hesitated a moment, then quickly embraced Spock, briefly, awkwardly. "No, my Vulcan friend. It's only beginning."



# A MEDLEY OF CHRISTMAS SONGS

by Bev Volker (in one evening of insanity)

## OH, ENTERPRISE

(tune: Oh, Christmas Tree)

Oh, Enterprise, our Enterprise,  
New silver starship sailing  
Oh, Enterprise, our Enterprise,  
The stars once more are trailing  
At Christmas time, this year, we'll see  
You warping out where you should be  
And Kirk and Spock return to thee  
New silver starship sailing



## MOVIE SONG

(tune: Chipmunk Song)

Motion Picture Time is near  
Time for grins and time for tears  
We've been good but we can't last  
Hurry, movie, hurry fast  
Want to see Kirk in command  
Want to see Spock hold his hand  
We can hardly stand the wait  
Please, movie, don't be late.



MISTER SPOCK, PLEASE

(tune: Mister Santa / Mister Sandman)

Mister Spock - what can I do  
I can't help watchin' how Kirk's watchin' you  
It's an addiction - I'm hooked for the present  
There is no logic, but it sure is pleasant

Spock - it fills my dreams  
With lots of huggin'  
And hurt/comfort scenes  
I'll write plots, to make it work  
Mister Spock, now you can squeeze Kirk.

Mister Spock - read every zine  
And pretty soon you'll know just what I mean  
When Kirk is down, just lend him your shoulder  
And keep him warm when he gets colder, colder

Spock - I love it so  
I think it's time that  
You really should know  
I'm not a Vulcan like you  
Mister Spock, oh, what can I do.

Mister Spock - it's been so good  
To know somehow that you've understood  
You may pretend you have no emotion  
But watch our Captain set it all in motion

Spock - listen to me  
You know what I am  
Expecting to see  
Now that special time is here  
Fill my Christmas wishes this year.



## WHAT SHOW IS THIS?

(tune: *What Child is This?*)



In days of yore we laid to rest  
A TV show by its rating  
And yet it seems that the fans knew best  
The fervor kept escalating.

CHORUS:

This, this is Star Trek's time  
It lives again on the giant screen  
Haste, haste to form the lines  
To see the Motion Picture.

For long, long years the fen did thrive  
On re-runs and conventions  
To keep the theme and the dream alive  
And plan for its resurrection (repeat Chorus)

Now Kirk and Spock are back on board  
The cosmic storms to weather  
The dedication at last has scored  
And brought them here together (repeat Chorus)

## FANDOM WONDERLAND

(tune: *Winter Wonderland*)

Faithful fen, are you list'nin  
Once again, stars are glist'nin  
A beautiful sight  
We're happy tonight  
Waitin' for the movie to premiere.

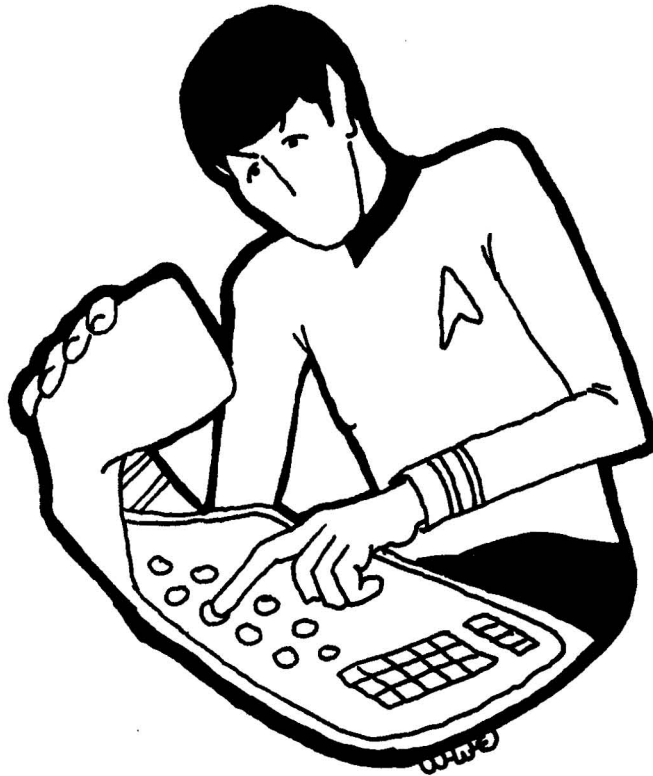
Gone away are the blue days  
Here to stay are the new days  
We're on the right track  
We've got it all back  
Now at last the Motion Picture's here.

On the bridge we're watching Kirk commanding  
Knowing Spock is right there at his side  
In his place, McCoy again is standing  
And our hearts are filled with joy and pride.

Later on we'll conspire  
Write new zines to inspire  
To face unafraid  
The dream that we made  
Now at last the Motion Picture's here.







"CAPTAIN, SENSORS SHOW EIGHT QUADROPEDS PULLING A NON-WHEELED  
CONVEYANCE CONTAINING..."

# STAR OF THE LOST

Terri Sylvester

Spock bent over the sensors, adjusting dials in a vain attempt to locate the shuttlecraft on the planet below. He had tracked its path as it neared the surface and went in under a cloud formation. Abruptly it had disappeared. The sensors were unable to pierce the clouds. They could only provide the information that the clouds contained an unknown element and appeared to circle the planet in a definite orbital path.

*Where are you, Jim? Why did I let you go down without me?*

Kirk had insisted. He would be fine and wasn't he taking Ensign Cray with him. He would go down to get a small spruce tree with which to surprise the crew at the party. He would be gone only an hour or two at the most.

The two hours had stretched to four and still no sign of the Captain.

Desperately Spock began to review the known facts about the planet below. The Enterprise, on a survey mission, had beamed down a landing party to explore the surface and take samples. It was a Class M planet containing no life forms other than plants, none of which had proven harmful. Its lush plains, sparkling waters and green forests had made it seem much like home to Jim. Truly a dream planet that might, in a thousand years, nurture the first sentient life forms to appear on it.

Spock looked up to find McCoy's eyes staring at him, lines of worry creasing his forehead. "Did you find them?"

"Negative, Doctor. The sensors are unable to penetrate the clouds."

"What about the transporter, Spock?"

"Doctor, the transporter panel is being overhauled. There was some difficulty in returning the landing party earlier. Captain Kirk used the Galileo because the transporter was out of service. I shall take the Columbus down to the surface and search for the Captain."

"I'm going with you, Spock." Anticipating Spock's refusal, McCoy went on, "If Jim is injured you'll need me down there."

Recognizing the logic of McCoy's statement and the doctor's desperate need to go with him, Spock replied, "Very well, Doctor."

Spock crossed to the Command chair and punched the button for Engineering.

"Mr. Scott, you have command. Doctor McCoy and I are taking the Columbus down to search for the Captain."

"Aye, Mr. Spock -- and good luck."



Spock had travelled the same flight path Kirk had used before he disappeared. The only tense moments came as they passed through the clouds. The ship rocked and vibrated, but emerged unharmed, to land safely on the surface. It was late afternoon on the planet and there was no sign of the Galileo. Spock began to work the sensors.

"Thank God we're down here," McCoy began. "Now maybe you can -- what's the matter, Spock? Can't you get a fix on Jim?"

"No, Doctor, I cannot. It would seem that the clouds inhibit sensor readings from below as well."

"If we can't use the sensors, how will we find them? We don't even know what direction they took."

"Precisely, Doctor," Spock replied. The tension in his voice betrayed the emotions hidden beneath the calm exterior. "I shall have to map out an expanding circular search pattern over the surface. We will have to depend on visual sighting of the Galileo and we shall have to hurry. It will be dark in 1.4 hours."



It was dark when Spock brought the Columbus down for a landing.

"It is useless to continue, Doctor." Although every nerve cried out for action, Spock knew they could not continue to search in the darkness. "We will have to spend the night here and begin again with the first light."

"We can't stop, Spock! Jim could be hurt or in danger out there." Anger born of desperation made McCoy's voice harsh.

The words cut through Spock. They were echoes of his own thoughts and intensified the pain he felt.

"I fully realize that, Doctor," Spock answered sharply. The naked pain on McCoy's face matched his own and he willed his voice to a gentler tone. "It would do Jim no good if we were to crash or, in the darkness, pass over without seeing him. We shall have to wait for daylight. The end of the cloud cover appears to be coming over the horizon. Perhaps by morning we shall be able to use the sensors."

Realizing the truth of Spock's words, McCoy forced himself to calm down. He, too, could see twinkling stars in the far distant sky. It was going to be a long night.



Three hours passed. Spock and McCoy had moved outside the Columbus to lie on the green grass. Each intent on his own feelings, they had found speculation too painful and had done little talking. Periodically Spock had attempted to take sensor readings. Although they could see a widening patch of clear sky in the distance, the sensors remained mute. McCoy stirred restlessly nearby. Spock hoped that the doctor would be able to get some rest. His skill might be needed should they find Jim tomorrow. Spock corrected his thoughts -- *when* they found Jim. They had to find him. If they did not -- there would be no purpose in the universe for him. Spock forced his thoughts away. Jim was alive -- he could feel it. Unable to lie there any longer, he got to his feet and turned toward the Columbus. Automatically directing his gaze to the distant clearing skies, he saw it! -- a bright beam of light reaching up to touch the stars.

"Doctor, look!"

The urgency in Spock's voice brought McCoy to his feet. He turned in the direction Spock faced.

"A distress beam! Thank God! He's alive, Spock."

"It would seem so, Doctor." Relief flowed through Spock, washing away the past fear-filled hours. "If we take the Columbus high enough, we should be able to avoid the hazards on the ground, and reach the beam in the dark."

McCoy, already running for the shuttlecraft, threw over his shoulder, "What are you waiting for, Spock?"

"Indeed, Doctor, I was not aware that I was waiting," Spock replied, close on McCoy's heels.



The beam had appeared relatively close when they started, but they had been airborne nearly an hour before they sighted the point of origin. It was coming from a clump of woods at the edge of a field. Landing the Columbus, they ran toward the trees. The shuttlecraft point of entry was obvious. Smaller peripheral trees had been sheared off, creating a hole leading to the denser growing trees.

They could see the back of the craft and ran toward it. Coming up the side, they saw the front collapsed and crumpled back. A large tree had fallen across the wreckage. Kirk and Ensign Cray were still in their seats. The weight of the tree on the twisted metal made it impossible for them to move more than a few inches in any direction. Kirk's head was thrown back, while Cray was slumped forward. McCoy, fearing what he would find, entered the craft with Spock right behind. He bent and reached for Kirk, searching for signs of life. At McCoy's touch, Kirk opened his eyes.

"Bones, is that really you? Where's Spock?"

"Right here, Captain."

Kirk looked into Spock's worried eyes. "I knew you'd find us, but what took you so long?" Kirk's teasing tone sent its own message to Spock.

"Save your questions, Jim," McCoy broke in. "We have to get you both out of here first."

"How's Ensign Cray?"

"Take it easy, Captain and I'll check," McCoy soothed.

Spock had returned outside and was surveying the extent of the damage.

"Apparently this large tree is the cause of your imprisonment, Captain. I think I can raise it. Doctor, if you will remove the Captain and Ensign Cray when I lift, we may be able to free them."

"Don't try, Spock," Kirk called. "It's too heavy. Use the transporter."

"We can't, Jim," McCoy replied. "The transporter is still out."

Kirk and McCoy watched as Spock bent under the tree. Bracing his legs, he began to apply upward pressure with his back. Inch by inch the tree began to lift. Once more Kirk and McCoy were witnesses to the strength and power possessed by the Vulcan. Slowly the weight of the tree was relieved and McCoy found he could slide Kirk from his seat. Pulling him from the wreckage, McCoy ran back in, reappearing moments later with Cray. As soon as they were clear, Spock reached up, bracing the tree with his arms. Lowering his back, he stepped clear of the trunk with a swift and graceful movement, allowing it to crash back down on the wreckage.

Sitting in the open field near the Columbus, Kirk was aware that feeling was returning to his legs. The familiar 'pins and needles' were beginning. Spock was seated on the ground beside him. Kirk turned and looked into his eyes. In their depths Kirk read the fear and anxiety of the past hours, and the quiet joy Spock now felt having found his Captain once more. Kirk reached over and covered Spock's hand with his own.

"Thank you, my friend."

For a long moment each savored the warm feeling of being whole and complete -- at peace with the world. McCoy's voice broke the mood.

"Ensign Cray will be all right, Jim. A nasty head wound. With the sensors out, it might have been another story if we hadn't spotted your distress beam."

Startled, Kirk rose to his feet. "I sent no distress beam."

"But you must have."

"I couldn't have! When we came down near the surface, the console short-circuited, knocking out most of the controls. We were barely able to keep the Galileo from crashing nose first into the ground. We managed to skim the surface until we came to the woods. Whatever circuits were still operating, the crash finished. It was impossible to send out a beam."

"Spock and I both saw it."

"Indeed, Jim, we did follow a distress beam here."

"It was hitting that bright star up there," McCoy said, pointing. Three pairs of eyes focused on the bright, now twinkling star overhead. There was no beam. Nothing marred the jet black beauty of the sky.

"But we did see it..." McCoy's voice trailed off.

Kirk stared at the sky. "If I didn't know better..." he said quietly.

"Know what, Jim?" Spock asked.

"I remember an ancient Earth legend. It told of a bright star that led three wise men to the one for whom they searched. It was called the Star of Bethlehem."

"On Vulcan we, too, have a legend of a bright star. In pre-reform days it would appear after the loss of a chieftain. Its rays would touch the next one to be leader of the tribe. It was called the Star of the Lost."

Kirk turned to look at Spock.

"It would seem that we have our own star."

"If you two are through mooning over the stars," McCoy broke in gruffly, "I'd like to get Cray back to Sickbay, and I think it would be a good idea if you both got some rest before the party."

"Party?"

"Don't you remember, Jim?" McCoy replied. "Tomorrow is Christmas day."



## The Beacon

Star of Stars  
Far-flung among  
The countless billions  
That dress the Universe  
In diamond pinpoints ,  
Why does your light shine brighter ,  
Reach farther ,  
Touch hearts more deeply ,  
Than all the rest . . .  
Is it legend or fact  
That your glow  
Will lead to that which we seek . . .  
And if the answer is love ,  
Will it also lead me to you . . .  
As it has lead seekers of truth ,  
Seekers of hope ,  
To their journey's end  
On a multitude of planets  
At different times ,  
In different ways ,  
Will we find each other  
Tonight . . .

Bev Volker









# *'Twas the Night*

(with apologies to Clement Clarke Moore)



*'Twas the night before Christmas, when down the dark aisle,  
A Vulcan crept quietly; he was wearing a smile.  
The crew was hung over, too much holiday cheer.  
They were all celebrating a joyous new year.  
And Kirk in his tunic (McCoy in his lap)  
Were sprawled unceremoniously taking a nap.  
When out of the darkness arose such a clatter,  
Spock sprang to the bridge to see what was the matter.  
Away to the window he flew like a flash,  
Dragging Kirk right behind him and Bones, who was smashed.  
The glow on the rim of the saucer's great disk  
Showed stars and silence and nothing amiss,  
When what to his wondering eyes should appear  
But one Klingon vessel, its intent all too clear.  
The screen was ajumble, alarms rang and rang.  
Spock braced for the picture, then stared: It was Kang!  
More rapid than warp drive, Kang's soldiers behind him  
Rushed to his side, as by name he called them.  
"Now, Krusher! Now, Kancer! Now, Krancer and Klixen!  
On, Komet! On, Kupid! On, Klunder and Klitzen!  
To the transporter booth, to the transporter wall!  
Now dash away, dash away, dash away all!"  
The plan seemed a rash one; it just couldn't work,  
And though Kang was a Klingon, he was a lot like James Kirk.  
The Vulcan's suspicions bore closer inspection,  
Kang's voice held the clue.... a perplexing inflection.  
The Klingon's face glistened with cold perspiration,  
And beneath it, Spock sensed a grave desperation.*





# *Before Christmas*

**Theresa Wright**

The Vulcan stood silent, and then shook his head,  
"Set one foot on this ship, and you all will be dead!"  
Kang's eyes, how they twinkled! his chin was so hairy!  
His cheeks were so crimson, as red as a cherry.  
"All right, Mr. Spock," Kang seemed to deflate,  
"We surrender. You win. There's no time to hate."  
"Kang, you're a soldier," Spock said, "and corrupt...  
Because of my knowledge, this seems quite abrupt.  
There must be a reason for this little ploy  
For I know a surrender won't bring you great joy."  
The Klingon smiled slightly and shifted his girth.  
"Mara, my wife, is about to give birth.  
We have no physician and no place to go.  
We've searched through the planets, looked high and looked low.  
There's no room at Centauri, no room at Leegrin,  
No room at Y-14, no room at Thee-N.  
And so for this reason, we'll give no resistance  
For it seems we require your doctor's assistance."  
And that's how it happened that Doctor McCoy  
Delivered of Mara one strong Klingon boy  
On the eve before Christmas in deep outer space;  
His reward was the look on the father's dark face.  
A celebration was held and Kang made a speech,  
"My friends, you have proved 'we are one -- we reach!'  
Peace to the union, the great Federation!  
Peace and prosperity to our Klingon nation!  
Peace to the Vulcans, much goodness and light,  
Peace unto all and to all a good night!"

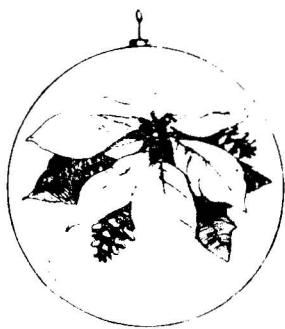




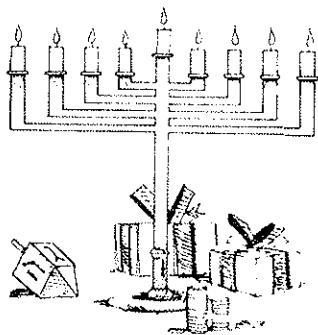
## *Crisis*

I'm sorry, Jim, I'm just not sure  
I wish I could be more optimistic  
Especially since it's Christmas.  
You know I'll do everything I can  
To help him.  
I guess maybe you have more faith than me,  
More confidence... courage.  
I've always been a bit of a cynic.  
He's your friend, Jim - mine, too,  
And I hate having to be the one to tell you  
But I'm not sure he's going to make it -  
Spock's never trimmed a tree before.

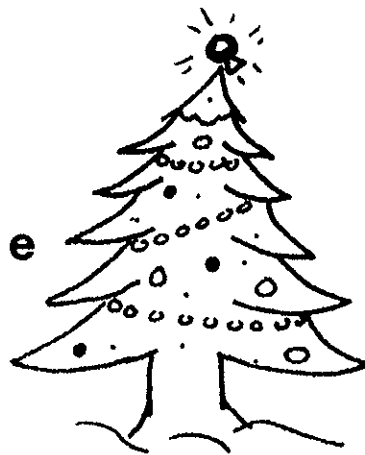
-- B. J. Volker --



# Festival Of Lights



Linda White



McCoy was jubilant.

"Cap'n, I can't believe you arranged this."

He stood in the middle of the rustic lobby, his eyes moving everywhere at once, trying to take it all in. A large fireplace formed the hub of the room, warm lights reflecting off the polished brass of its hood. Several crewmembers sat around the raised stone rim, sipping drinks, most of them in ski togs or cold-weather wear. A wall of glass looked out on a wooden deck with a view of the ski slopes. In the center of the lodge was a large sunken garden. A tall pine tree took advantage of its sheltered status and stretched upward halfway to the second floor. A staircase framed the pine. On one side of the stairwell was a long bar doing a brisk business. On the other side was the lobby and front desk. The last wall of the main floor belonged to the restaurant. It, too, had a partial view of the ski slopes, but also looked out over the rugged magnificence of some untouched Belarian terrain, this part of which had been covered in snow and ice since Julius Caesar ruled the Romans.

McCoy shook his head back and forth. "They told Uhura they were booked up."

Kirk shrugged, smiling. "Uhura didn't date the owner's sister."

The doctor hmped. "You dated his sister and he still talks to you?"

"*She* still talks to me." He sipped his toddy and added, "I dated her, too."

McCoy couldn't believe it. "I've got to hand it to you, Jim. Frankly, in the same situation, I'd be afraid to show my face."

The Captain drained his cup and moved toward the bar. "Actually, Bones, it worked out rather well. Of course, I didn't date them both at once. Let's see, Ginger and I were a hot item in the second grade, and Paula and I were inseparable in the third. No conflicts. Ginger decided I wasn't prestigious enough and went after the teacher's pet."

McCoy laughed. "Still, a posh resort like this... We've got a lot of people on that ship. How'd you --?"

"Well, most of our people will have to return to the ship to sleep. But we were in the neighborhood. And it's almost Christmas. And the Festival of Lights down here is something to see. Paula did manage to find us six rooms, but whoever draws them will have to double up."

He set his empty cup on the bar and patted McCoy's shoulder. "In face, Bones, I think you are the man to take charge of the drawing. Here are the five room keys. Figure it out any way you want. I'll be -- "

"Five? I thought you said there were six rooms."

Kirk was taken aback. "Really, Doctor, rank does have its privileges."

McCoy grinned. "Just don't break anything skiing." He jiggled the keys. "Oh, well, there's at least one person on board who won't be disappointed when he doesn't win the draw."

"Who's that?" asked Kirk, straightening his tunic.

"Why, Spock, of course."

The Captain nodded once in agreement. "I believe you're right. Besides, he's sharing my room. In fact, I think he just came in. Take care of that drawing, Bones. I'm counting on you. See you on the slopes."

And before McCoy could say another word, he was gone.

Standing in the middle of the lobby, weekenders in either hand, wearing a quilted, hooded parka, Commander Spock looked like nothing so much as a bewildered eskimo.

"Spock! You made it." The Captain's face lit up with the greeting.

The Vulcan looked slightly uncomfortable. "Did you doubt that I would follow instructions?"

Kirk took one of the weekenders and lowered his voice, his tone a bit less jubilant. "I didn't order you to come, Spock. I thought you might enjoy getting off the ship. If you would be more comfortable on the Enterprise..."

"No," Spock said, so quickly that he embarrassed himself. He stared at his feet. "Forgive me," he said quietly. "But sharing a room... My constant presence will not hinder your... holiday activities?"

The Captain grinned wryly. "I'm here for a rest, Spock. I want to ski, enjoy the scenery, watch the pageantry and relax." He led the way to the stairs, still talking. "I don't want to have to watch every word or edit my conversation for non-fleet personnel. I don't want to give a personal history every time I mention someone in passing." Kirk took the stairs two at a time. Spock hit every step but managed to pace the human. As they reached the third floor corridor, Kirk was still talking, reading the door numbers as they moved down the hall. "When I mention Rigel or Berengaria, I don't want blank eyes staring back at me. And I don't want to come back to an empty room." He located the number he was looking for, inserted the identicard key in the slotted lock and entered the room. "So, you see," he finished, dumping the weekender on one of the double beds and spreading his arms helplessly, "rooming with you was the only logical thing to do."

Spock nodded somberly. He looked uncertainly about the room, his eyes moving from the glowing fake fireplace to the snowy scene beyond the large wall-length window, and chewed his bottom lip. That was not the reaction the Captain had hoped for.

"Hey," Kirk said softly, squeezing Spock's arms through the heavy parka, "lighten up." He winked. "That's an order."

Spock stared at his feet. "I am uncomfortable in the snow."

Kirk pulled away, momentary anger flashing in his eyes. "Uncomfortable in the snow, uncomfortable on the ship -- !" He bit off the words and wished he could bite off his tongue. That had hurt.

His voice barely audible, Spock began, "I told you, it would pass. I did not ask to intrude upon your holiday."

"Spock..."

"I shall return to the ship."

"No!" Kirk reached out and took the bag that Spock had not released, depositing it on the other bed. "You're staying. I apologize. I shouldn't have said anything." He smiled, trying to lighten the mood. "Hey, I'm sorry."

Spock's voice was tense with suppressed emotion. "I did not complain. I would have said nothing at all. But you ordered me to... You insisted that I... "

"You didn't have to complain. Don't you understand? I may not be a telepath, but damn it, don't you think I can tell when you're upset? When you're depressed? Spock, I'm your friend. I don't want you to be miserable. Not when everyone else is having such a good time."

The Vulcan drew a ragged breath.

The human tried to ignore the chord of response that sound struck within him. "They don't mean to shut you out," he said softly. "They're just so wrapped up in themselves, in their shared excitement..." He moved closer to his friend but dared not add his touch to the flood of feeling beating at Spock's emotional dam. "I don't suppose it would help much to tell you that some humans experience the same depression for pretty much the same reasons?" There was no reply. "I want you to stay," Kirk said at last. "There's only room for one in that command chair. I get lonely." He spread his hands, his face filled with pain. "I want to spend my holidays with someone I care about. Is that too much to ask?"

For a moment, nothing. Then Spock pushed the hood of his parka back off his face and turned toward his Captain. His cheeks were green with embarrassment, his dark eyes soft with feeling.

"No," he said quietly. "It is not too much to ask."



The crowd in the lodge was loud and jovial. The civilian guests were exhibiting a pleasant curiosity about their Starfleet visitors. Various crewmembers were basking in the limelight, narrating a few exciting Enterprise exploits, exaggerating some not-so-exciting ones. A rush of cold air accompanied a tired group of skiers through the double doors. Another group was having one last drink before joining the torchlight brigade on the lifts for night skiing.

Spock followed Kirk down the stairs, his Vulcan features seeming strangely out of place in the nordic atmosphere. He wore a soft green hooded sweater and brown wool pants. Not visible were the thermals Kirk had instructed him to bring. The Captain looked much more natural in his cream colored jumpsuit.

"Jim! Spock!" McCoy hailed them from his roost on the rim of the fireplace. Two young women perched on either side of him, one ebony skinned, one a redhead. Kirk approached. Spock followed, not wanting to be separated from his Captain.

"Hello, Bones," Kirk grinned. "I see you've managed to meet some natives."

"Jim, you won't believe this, but Thelma, here, is from Georgia. Now if that don't beat all!" He grinned broadly, alcohol helping his southern drawl. "And Anita just loves starship captains. She told me so herself."

Anita, the redhead, disentangled herself from McCoy and began getting acquainted with Kirk's arm. "So, you're a starship captain." She smiled with her whole body.

"So, you're a ski bunny." He said it with a smile, but it was obvious she didn't know whether to take it as an insult or not. She recovered quickly.

"Doctor McCoy tells me you're an excellent skier."

"I get by."

"Get by?" interjected McCoy. "Jim, you're a natural on skis and you know it." He grinned even wider than before. "Maybe you could give Anita some lessons."

The Captain gently removed the woman from his arm. "Maybe next trip, Bones. I'm booked up this week. It was nice meeting you, Anita." He gave her his most charming smile, vaguely promising some future interest. It wasn't enough to allay her disappointed pout, but she backed off gracefully, reattaching herself to McCoy.

"All right, Jim," the doctor shrugged, "but don't say I didn't try."

As Kirk moved on past McCoy toward the restaurant, Spock followed, moving even closer to him as he spoke.

"Captain, if you wish to spend some time with that young woman, I am quite capable of entertaining myself."

"Would you quit trying to get rid of me?" There was a tease in Kirk's voice. "I told you, I want to spend this shoreleave with you. Besides, you heard me tell McCoy my lesson book is full."

Spock looked puzzled. Kirk elaborated.

"Tomorrow morning we're renting some equipment and I'm going to teach *you* to ski!"





Morning came all too soon for Spock. He had no desire to spend his shoreleave exposed to icy winds and snow covered slopes. But Kirk had made it very clear that he wanted the company of his Vulcan friend. And Spock was not going to jeopardize that situation. Silently, he dressed, following his Captain's instructions. ("First the thermals. Then three layers over that. You want to be able to peel things off if you get too warm." Eyebrow raised in disbelief. "And you'll carry a parka in your pack in case you're not warm enough." Eyebrow lowered to a more comfortable angle.)

In the restaurant the Captain ate a hearty breakfast, foregoing the blatant animal protein of ham and eggs for a more subtle stack of waffles. The sacrifice was not lost on Spock. In appreciation, he consumed his hot cereal and fruit without protest although he was not truly hungry.

"You'll be using a lot of energy out there," said Jim. "It's best to eat something." He sipped his coffee. "Since you've never been on skis, I thought we'd do some cross-country. It's easier, and safer. McCoy would never forgive me if I brought you home with a broken leg." He followed Spock's gaze out onto the crowded slopes. A line had formed at the chairlift and was drawing new members faster than the lift could remove them. Up on the hill the faster skiers were zig-zagging flashily among the less competent. Two people, rendered sexless by distance, collided and fell, sliding several yards down the packed slope. The surface was slick. One of the downed skiers seemed unable to regain his/her footing and kept slipping down the slope, creating a further hazard for the upright skiers. The hill was alive with brightly clad people.

The Captain pointed off to the left. "We'll take off in that direction."

Spock moved his attention to the indicated terrain. Dark green conifers poked resigned heads through the snow at widely spaced intervals as the sharp slope of the ski runs gave way to gently rolling mounds of untouched snow.

"Hardly anybody out that way. It looks like we'll have a nice quiet day ahead of us."

Spock nodded silently, but still looked somewhat unconvinced. Kirk smiled at him.

"Hey, it'll be fun. Trust me. Try to relax, okay?"

Spock's expression softened. "I shall try, Jim."



"It's as easy as walking, actually," Kirk said chattily. He secured his bindings with a short jab of his ski pole, then gave each foot a shake.

Bleakly, Spock watched as the human glided easily toward him. They were only a few yards from the ski shop door. Spock had hoped they would move away from the crowds before beginning, but Kirk had told him that wasn't possible. ("Once we're off the packed snow, we'd better be on skis or snowshoes or we'll sink out of sight.") Here amidst the more competent skiers, the Vulcan felt embarrassed and awkward.

"Okay, Spock, let's get yours on. This is level ground. You won't go anywhere. Tamp your skis into the snow. Good. You have a right and a left ski. They have to be on the proper foot. These holes in the extended toe of your ski shoe fit over these pegs. That's right. Now put your weight on the toe of your right foot and use your pole tip to punch that binding down... Terrific. Now that wasn't so bad, was it? And finally, shake your foot a bit to see if your binding is secure."

Spock lifted his right foot and gave it a vigorous shake. The ski dropped onto the snow.

The Captain cleared his throat. He very carefully did not laugh. "Well, Spock, these things take some getting used to. Meanwhile, I'll give you a hand." He squatted on his skis and maneuvered Spock's feet into his toe bindings. "There. Now, remember, these are cross-country skis, not downhill. You're only attached to the ski at the toe. You don't have as much control of the ski as downhillers do. But these are safer. Besides, we won't need alpine control. We won't be running slaloms or coming straight down the mountain." He smiled in reassurance.

Spock, however, did not look reassured.

"Now," Kirk went on, "your poles. Put your hands up and through the loop... Good. Now grip both the pole and the strap. That's it. Keep your poles at your sides. Don't lean on them. Balance on the skis." He glided away a few feet and turned to Spock. "How do you feel?"

The Vulcan's answer was an ascending eyebrow which carried with it the burdens of all great martyrs.

"Right," said Kirk. So far Spock was not enjoying himself. Several people were discreetly watching the curiosity of a Vulcan on skis, but not so discreetly that Spock was not aware of them. The Captain returned effortlessly to his friend's side. His eyes twinkled.

"You have, of course, calculated the needed thrust and proper angles necessary for locomotion on skis?"

Spock caught the twinkle and nodded. "Of course, Captain. A simple set of mathematical formulae, easily applied."

"Like walking," said Kirk, "except when you shift your weight to your forward foot, you glide a little bit while bringing your other foot forward. Like so." He demonstrated, moving ahead a few feet, then stopped and turned to watch his friend.

The Vulcan took a calming breath. Then, very deliberately, he stepped off on his right ski. But what Kirk did so easily suddenly seemed the trick of a sorcerer. His right leg refused to wait for his left and, swinging his arms wildly in an attempt to catch his balance, Spock plopped ignominiously into the snow between his skis. His startled expression gave way to a slightly flushed but grim control. Laughter floated all too readily through his ski cap to his sensitive ears. But his Captain's gentle voice removed the sting of it.

"I believe, Mr. Spock, that a slight recalculation is in order." He returned to lift Spock upright. "But this time, allow for bending your knees."

Once off the packed snow, the surface was not so slick and Spock found he was able to move with fewer problems. Kirk remained at his side, pacing him stride for stride, correcting his form, complimenting his progress, and quietly enjoying himself.

"Spock, you're doing beautifully. We'll have you ready for the ski patrol in no time. Let's try some turns."

Patiently, Spock listened to his instructions and performed every movement. Well away from the crowded lodge now, the Vulcan was more relaxed. He step-turned 360 degrees, first right, then left. He followed his Captain as the human skied in a circle, using his step-turn. And when Kirk wanted him to practice getting up unaided, he obediently fell sideways into the snow, rolled onto his knees, braced with his poles and lifted himself upright.

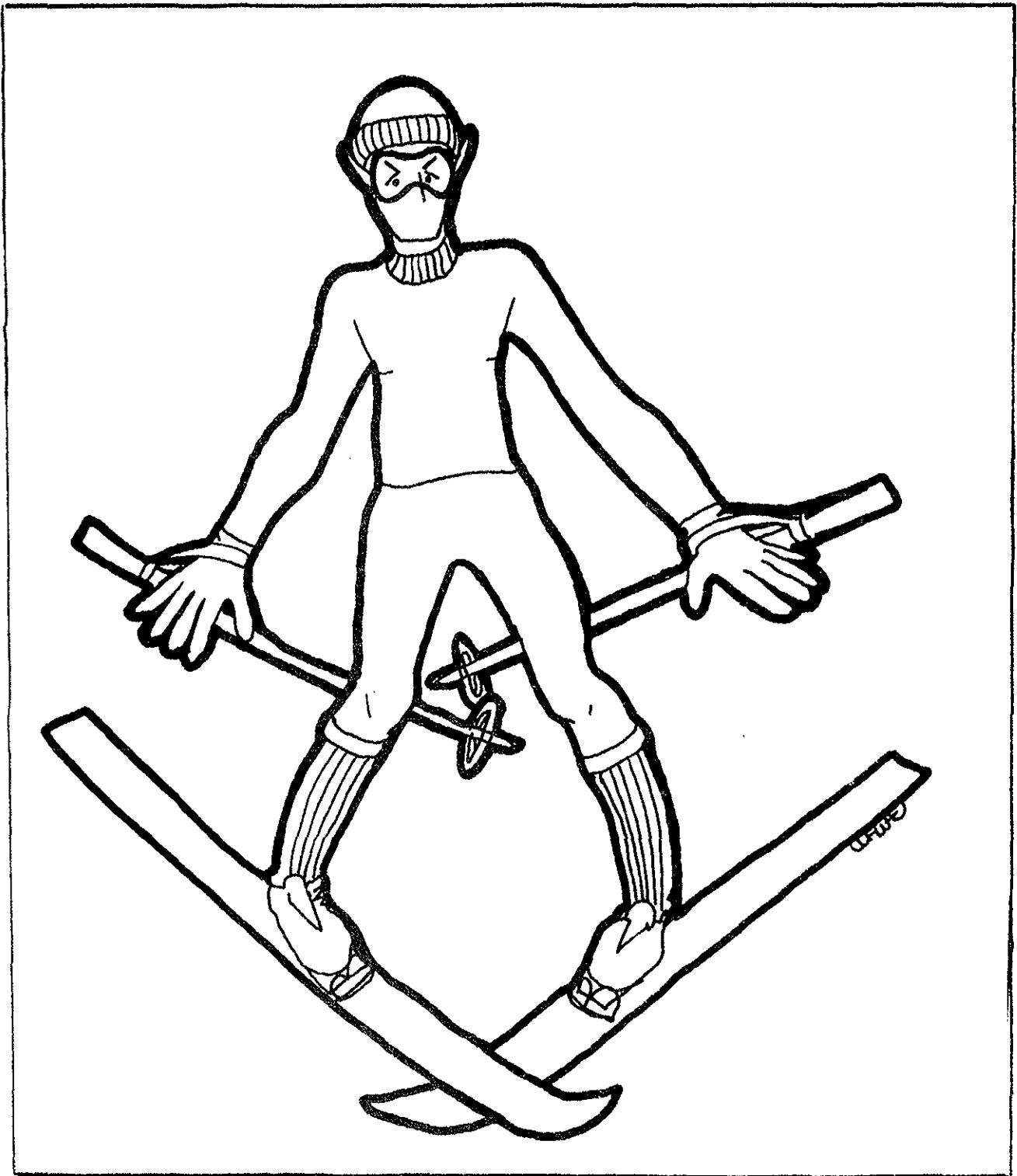
"Great," Jim smiled. "Now I want you to learn to stop."

"Stop, Captain? I have already stopped several times."

"Yes, but we're on a flat surface, Spock. We're going to run into a few hills, and it helps if you know how to stop yourself without being stopped by something else. Like a tree, for example."

"Oh."

"We'll try the snowplow first." He explained the mechanics of the maneuver, had Spock follow him to the edge of a slope and demonstrated. After picking up speed for a few yards, he executed a perfect snowplow, turned to the left, and stopped completely about halfway down the hill. "Nothing to it," he called up to Spock. "Keep your skis parallel as you push off. Then start your snowplow to slow yourself down. And don't forget to bend your knees."



Beneath his yellow snow goggles, Spock was the picture of concentration. Skis parallel. Knees bent. Push off with poles. Not too difficult. Gathering speed. Implement snowplow.

He pushed his heels apart, forming a slight "V" with his skis, but continued to gather speed. Odd. The Captain had slowed at this point.

"Spock, widen your plow!" Kirk shouted as the Vulcan slid past him. Spock pushed his heels further apart. At last he began to slow up a bit, but not enough. He was headed straight for a copse of trees at the bottom of the hill.

"Spock!" came Kirk's distant voice. "Turn!"

Obediently, Spock tried to implement a step-turn and learned immediately that turning on the flat and turning on a hill were two different matters entirely. His ski tips crossed and he flew head first downhill into the snow. When the powder of snow settled, only his skis were visible.

Kirk poled himself down the hill and almost fell on top of his friend in his haste. "Spock! Are you all right?"

A mound of snow stirred to life and Spock lifted his head. "If you mean, am I uninjured, the answer is yes." He tried to push himself upright, but he had lost a ski pole and his arm crunched down through the snow, pulling his face down with it.

Kirk had to laugh.

Spock flailed at the unsupportive snow but only sank deeper.

The Captain knelt on his skis, still laughing, and slipped an arm under Spock's chest, pulling his face out of the snow.

"Here," he gasped, "use my pole to push yourself up."

Spock did so. He pulled his skis under him and attempted to stand, but before he could reach a squat, the skis, still pointed down hill, began to move, and he plunged again into the snow.

Kirk fell sideways into the hill and whooped gleefully, holding onto his stomach. "Spock," he called, lifting his goggles to wipe the tears from his eyes, "your skis have to be perpendicular to the slope before you stand up." Gasping and laughing, he demonstrated.

Somberly, Spock followed suit. Erect at last, he proceeded to brush the snow off his clothing. Ordinarily, he enjoyed the sound of Kirk's laughter, but right now he was cold and badly shaken and not at all pleased. He glared darkly at the human.

"Do you find my clumsiness amusing?"

The slight quiver in his voice brought Kirk up short. He moved to retrieve the ski pole Spock had dropped when he fell. His expression apologetic, he handed Spock the pole. "I don't suppose it would help to tell you everybody falls at first."

"And is everyone ridiculed?" His voice was filled with pain.

"Spock." The softly spoken word was a protest. "You know I wasn't laughing at you."

The dark eyes were uncertain. Kirk tried to explain, to reassure. "It's just that you looked so... so..." Struggling to avoid the word 'funny', he settled lamely on, "... cute."

Spock stood staring silently at his hands. The Captain shrugged, assuming his most innocent expression. "I was just enjoying myself, Spock. When I'm happy, I laugh. You know that."

Without lifting his eyes, Spock asked softly, "You are not annoyed by my slow progress?"

Kirk reached out and squeezed his arm. "Look at me," he ordered. Spock did so. "I chose to be here with you. You're my best friend. Nothing you do annoys me. Understood?"

Spock lowered his eyes again, but not before Kirk read the pleasure that shone in them. There was an awkward silence. Then Spock said softly, "I have been described in many ways but I believe this is the first time anyone has employed the adjective 'cute' in his description."

Kirk assumed a serious air, his eyes dancing. "Yes. I suppose it is undignified and incongruous to use such a label for the First Officer of a starship." He busied himself adjusting his pole straps. "I'll try to remember that... the next time you fall."

Spock lifted one haughty brow, murmured, "Indeed?" and shoved Kirk unceremoniously sideways down the hill. The Captain flailed, fell and slid twelve meters before he could stop himself. Spock, his features melting into almost-a-smile, gazed down at him in satisfaction. Kirk brushed the snow off his goggles and stared ruefully back at him.

"Spock, remember a moment ago," (pulling snow out from under his collar), "when I said that nothing you do annoys me? Well," (digging snow out of his ears), "I may have been mistaken."



They returned to the lodge late in the afternoon, exhausted and cold, but far from miserable. When McCoy joined them that evening at dinner, Kirk was making animated conversation. Spock's responses were somewhat more restrained, but it was obvious that both men were enjoying themselves.

"Bones!" Kirk greeted. "Sit down. I was just telling Spock about the Festival of Lights."

"Tonight's the night," McCoy volunteered. "The people in the village have been preparing all day. I hear they're going to parade right by the lodge and out into the hills. Celebrating the longest day of the year by spreading light across the land throughout the night. That's about it, isn't it, Jim?"

Kirk nodded. "Actually, this planet's year is much longer than Earth's. The Festival of Lights just happened to fall near our own holidays this year." He smiled at Spock. "That was one reason I wanted to come here. Not many off-worlders have seen this festival. This ski lodge wouldn't be here if my old grade school flame hadn't married a Belarian and come here to live."

"Well, it doesn't coincide exactly with Christmas," McCoy smiled, lifting a glass of wine, "but it's close enough."

"Correct, Doctor," said Spock. "However, it does correspond with Earth's Festival of Lights, if I'm not mistaken."

"Exactly," Kirk agreed.

McCoy looked blankly from one to the other.

"Hanukkah," Spock explained. "Really, Doctor, are you so out of touch with your own culture?"

"Now just a minute, Spock," McCoy began. "If you think I'm..."

"Bones - no arguments," the Captain chuckled. "It's getting dark. Let's go find a place to watch the Festival."

Outside it was bitterly cold. Inside, the lodge guests and as many Enterprise people as could attend were milling about, enjoying the festivities, the fireplaces, the bar, and all waiting for the beginning of the Festival.

Kirk and McCoy were sipping hot mulled wine. Spock followed Kirk through the lobby as the Captain exchanged greetings with various crewmembers. A group near the windows motioned the Captain over as the lights began to dim. Several of them were wearing yarmulkes.

"Captain! Mr. Spock! We've got room over here." The crowd parted and Kirk, McCoy, and Spock advanced to the glass wall just as the lobby lights went out completely.

For a moment it was dark inside and out. Then the tinkling of a thousand crystal bells drifted to them across the snowy expanse and a column of torches, three abreast, began moving slowly across the landscape. The torches were chemically treated to burn different colors. As the parade continued, it transformed itself into a flickering, many-colored spectacle, moving across the landscape, the reds and blues and greens and oranges reflected by the snow. Then, one by one, the hills below them and as far as they could see lit up with many-colored lights until the Belarian countryside appeared to glow with rainbow-hued moonlight.

Murmurs of appreciation swept through the lobby. The indoor lighting came on again, dimly.

The Captain stood staring out at the surreal landscape, the tinkling of the crystal bells bringing him childhood images of Christmas sleighs and fairy tales.

"It is beautiful," Spock said softly. Kirk smiled at him.

"Glad I talked you into coming?"

Spock offered his thanks by returning the smile, barely noticeable in the dim light, but fully appreciated nonetheless.

McCoy, who had wandered off moments before, now reappeared. He cleared his throat formally.

"Ahem. Captain Kirk. Commander Spock. The crew of the Enterprise has prepared a little festival of its own, if you'll lend your attention."

In the greenhouse of the stairwell, a beautiful Earthborn pine rose up toward the ceiling. Montgomery Scott, grinning from ear to ear, punched a button on his remote control and the tree came alive with softly glowing colors. They seemed to float from branch to branch, in a slowly spinning spiral that culminated at the top of the tree.

Kirk looked, then looked again. "Spock -- "

"I see it." His deep voice was rich with feeling. Instead of a star, an IDIC perched atop the tree. And behind them, where they stood to watch Belaria come alive with light, a menorah answered those Belarian lights with seven of its own.

James Kirk smiled from deep inside. "Bones, you knew about this?"



McCoy just laughed. "We're not through yet, Jim. Go ahead, Lieutenant." He nodded to Uhura and the assembled crewmembers broke into a chorus of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." The second time through, it became, "We Wish You a Happy Hanukkah." Then they began again, but this time Kirk couldn't make out the words.

"Spock, what are they -- " The warm expression on the Vulcan's face made him falter. Then he finished. "What does it mean?"

Although their accents at first occluded the Vulcan syllables, by the end of the chorus, Spock was able to reply. "Loosely translated," he said, "they are saying, 'May your life know true contentment'."

The Captain slipped his arm around Spock's shoulders. "I'd say that was a worthy sentiment, Mr. Spock."

"Indeed." He did not trust himself to say more.

"Well, noo, Cap'n," Scotty purred, his brogue thick as butter. "Ye'll be joining me in a wee Christmas drink."

"I'd love to, Mr. Scott. Pour Spock a glass of that."

"Jim boy," McCoy drawled, "there's one more little item." He held out the bushy white beard.

"Oh, no, you don't. I'm not dressing up like Santa Claus."

"Come on, Jim. Just the beard."

"It's undignified," Kirk balked. But his protests didn't slow McCoy a bit. The doctor proceeded to slip the elastic cord over Kirk's head and snap the beard into place. It was off-center. Kirk glowered at him from under the billowing white mask. The crew applauded.

"Well, Spock?" asked McCoy, laughing. "Do you have words in Vulcan to describe that?"

"I have one in English, Doctor," he replied solemnly. "But it is undignified and incongruous to use such a label for the Captain of a starship."

Looking confused, the doctor muttered, "I need some holiday cheer," and headed for the bar.

Spock moved to Kirk's side, reaching out to fluff the cottony beard. He stood there silently as Kirk removed the thing. The Captain looked at him. "Are you all right?"

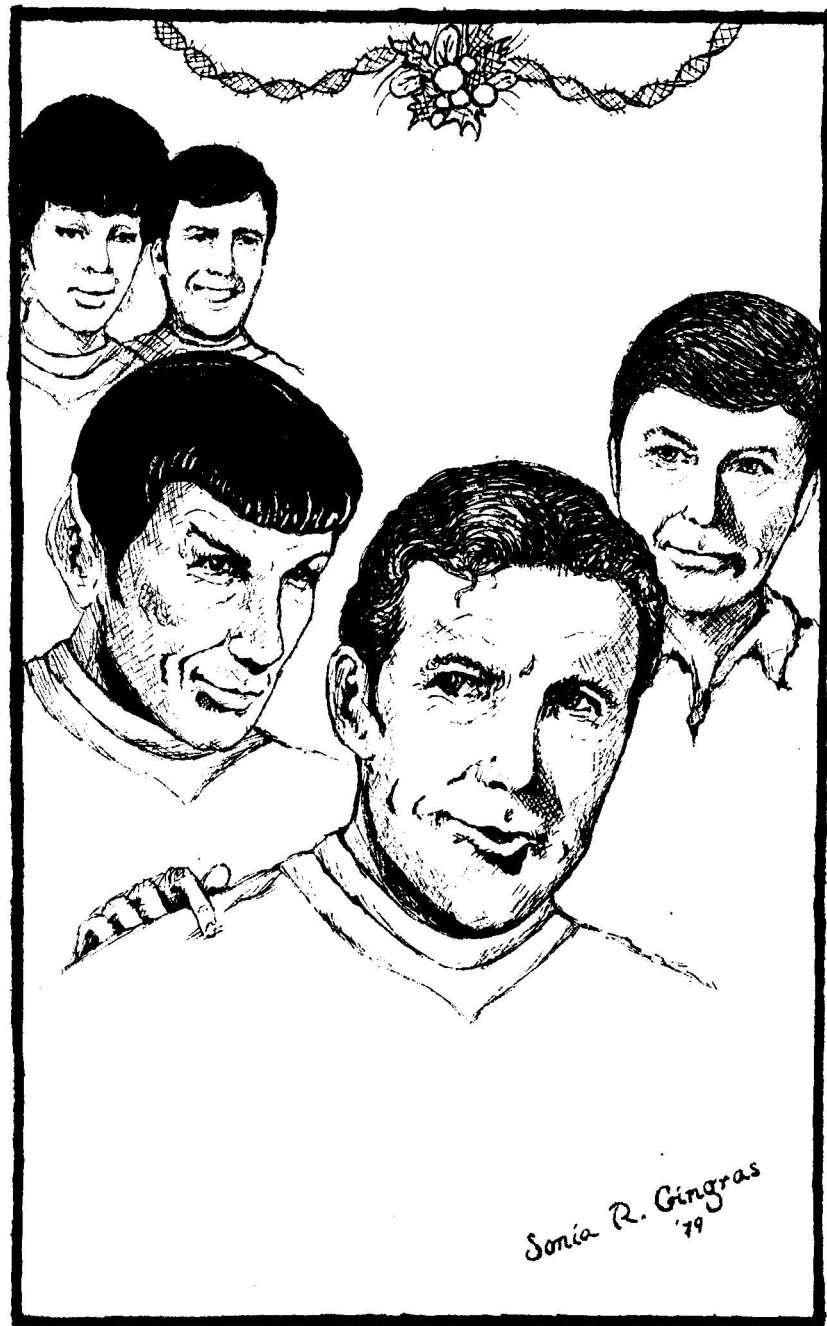
His features lit by a tiny smile, Spock nodded, affirmative. Then he said quietly, "Perhaps tomorrow you would like to teach me alpine skiing?"



## *It Had To Happen*

The Doctor with a gleeful face  
Hung mistletoe in every place  
Where certain men in gold or blue  
Are often seen, hurrying through,  
He waited with a delighted grin  
For one or the other to wander in.  
Bold ladies stayed for a chance to spring  
And get from top command the real thing.  
Bones hungered to see a red or green blush,  
As females haunted the room, poised to rush.  
But Spock was determined to spoil the fun,  
He avoided all traps, yes, every one.  
Wherever he went, no step did he take,  
Until his eyes a thorough search did make,  
But, lo, in the rec room Spock did see  
His Captain walk toward destiny,  
Each jostled the other in eagerness to start,  
As runners, they all leaped from the mark.  
Unsuspecting, Kirk strode proud and tall,  
But Spock was there first, ahead of all.

*Crystal Ann Taylor*



## The Present

It did not come on Christmas ,  
Wrapped in gaily printed paper ,  
And tied with bright ribbons .  
I did not even view it  
In happy anticipation  
And beg for hints ,  
A childlike guessing game  
I never outgrew

There was no tree ,  
No special season of  
Holiday Cheer

It was more subtle  
And I was not even aware of its existence  
Until I discovered  
It was all mine

Now , I behold  
With all the wonder and delight  
Of a child on that magical morning  
That you have given me  
The most precious gift ~  
Your Love .

# HOME *for* C

# H R I S T M A S



## Martha J. Bonds

*(inspired by HOME IS THE HUNTER, by N. Kippax  
and B. Volker; CONTACT 5/6)*

Christmas aboard the Enterprise... Commander Spock again marvelled at the celebrating of his human shipmates. No matter where they found themselves in space, despite their varying beliefs and traditions, no holiday season passed by without notice.

They needed such a celebration, even as a Vulcan needed meditation. It was a time of renewal, of hope. The spirit of sharing flowed from one person to the next, the philosophy of brotherhood was never more devoutly believed.

Tonight -- the annual party. Spock was already showered and had changed into an outfit he considered festive enough for the occasion - a satiny Vulcan tunic in varying shades of gold over russet-colored trousers. He checked his reflection in the mirror and found his attire satisfactory. It was not loud or garish, though surprisingly less austere than his usual mode of dress whether on duty or off.

Last year, he had attended the party in uniform. Last year, he had nearly not attended at all.

Last year, Jim was on Anthrania.

The Vulcan First Officer had thought a party would be in very poor taste considering that their Captain had been captured while on what the Anthranian government viewed as a spy mission. After three months of negotiations that produced nothing, and rumors of inhumane treatment, there were growing doubts that the prisoners would be released alive.

Morale was down and Spock had found no way to improve the situation. He was totally involved in working with Starfleet toward gaining Kirk's release.

He remembered McCoy's insistent voice. "Spock, this crew needs something to hold them together. The Christmas party's a tradition and right now tradition will give them something to believe in, to hold on to."

"Very well, Doctor," Spock had acquiesced, knowing that if they wished to have the party, he could hardly order them to stop it. "I understand the crew's need for relaxation and release. The party will take place tonight as scheduled. Enjoy yourself."

McCoy caught his arm and the Vulcan tensed. "You don't intend to go?"

Spock did not answer. McCoy pulled him around to face him, gripping both Spock's arms. His tone was harsh. "You are in command, Mr. Spock. It's not enough to allow the party to take place, you've got to be there."

"I don't *have* to do anything, Doctor." Spock extricated himself from McCoy's grasp. He sat down at his desk, switching on the viewer and hoping McCoy would have enough sense to drop the subject.

"Damn you, Spock." The words were hushed, the anger behind them building. "Just when I think you've learned to understand us a little, to be one of us, you turn around and do something like this! Just when I think you've learned to feel..." McCoy shook his head as if trying to calm himself, then his emotion resurfaced and more bitter words spilled out. "It was Jim, only Jim. You could make concessions for him, with him. Without him, though, you're back in the role of the cold, logical computer. Human values don't matter. *We* don't matter. You're cheating him, Spock, if you do this, telling everyone that you were just faking with him, pretending to feel, to care. If you're going to shrivel up like this without him, then he never really touched you at all!" McCoy's outburst finally died and the doctor turned on his heel and left the Vulcan alone.

Shaking, Spock reached to turn off the viewer. McCoy's words had cut him deeply, as they had been intended to do. The Vulcan sat staring at the closed door of his quarters, shivering as the argument replayed in his mind.

He'd had disagreements with McCoy before this, the doctor digging at him, pushing, trying to draw him out. McCoy himself had admitted going too far on several occasions, hurting when he had only meant to open Spock's eyes to what the Vulcan was doing. Usually, McCoy had stopped himself or softened his attack by making a complete turn-around, showing that he was capable of understanding Spock.

*"Why, you wouldn't know what to do with a warm, decent human feeling."*

*"Really, Doctor?"*

*"I know. I'm worried about Jim, too."*

Worried about Jim... too. The doctor must be dying inside, knowing his friend was a prisoner, knowing the Anthranians were uncivilized brutes who tortured for pleasure, knowing that if Kirk did come back, he'd have to try to heal the wounds. A difficult job for a friend...

And Spock did understand the meaning of friendship. Kirk had taught him that. He had taught him to understand human needs and motivations, within his hybrid self and within the other humans they encountered. McCoy was right. It would be the same as saying that his relationship with Kirk had been a lie if he failed to recognize the emotional needs of the crew at a time like this. Spock couldn't do that. For Jim's sake, for his crew, Spock would attend the Christmas party.

Anguished, exhausted by the constant worry with which he'd been living for three months, Spock rested his head on his folded arms, trying to still the incessant trembling, the frantic beating of his heart. No, he could no more give in to the emotional turmoil now than he could afford to 'shriveled up', to become a 'cold, logical computer' as McCoy had put it. Drawing from deep reserves of strength, he managed to calm himself. He rose, straightening his uniform and prepared to face the crew and McCoy.

He stood on the sidelines for a moment after entering the brightly decorated rec room. No one had as yet taken notice of his presence. It was not as bad as he had thought it would be. The celebrating was subdued, the people were quiet. Softly, in one corner, Uhura was leading a group in a solemn carole. It was a respectful gathering of people who needed release from worry and could find it only in the



companionship of their fellows and in the ancient traditions of their heritage and faith.

Out of the corner of his eye, Spock noticed the nod Uhura used to indicate to the doctor that the Vulcan had arrived. McCoy made his way over and, as he passed, others saw whom he was approaching. Talk died down as, expectantly, the men and women of the Enterprise waited to see what would pass between Captain Kirk's two closest friends.

McCoy stopped in front of the Vulcan and Spock observed that the man had been drinking. He was somewhat less than completely steady on his feet and his watery blue eyes were bloodshot. The obvious pain in them showed Spock that McCoy did regret his harsh words, but he knew the doctor would not admit that, especially since his tactics had worked, bringing Spock to the party after all.

The Vulcan reached out, lifting two glasses of golden liquid from the table. He handed one to McCoy. The moment of silence between them stretched out, unspoken volumes passing wordlessly before Spock realized the silence included the crew as well. It was time for him to say something to them, something to give them courage. Perhaps their reflected spirits would bolster his own flagging hopes.

He turned, meeting the eyes of the assembled group. "Our Captain," he began slowly, "cannot be with us tonight and his presence on this occasion is greatly missed. But, at this time and where he is, he needs to know that our thoughts are with him. Our hope... can lend him courage." Spock swallowed, maintaining tight control of his voice. He raised his glass in salute to the crowd. "Peace on earth. Good will toward men."

For a moment, the silence lingered, then Uhura and the musicians began another song and the party resumed. McCoy took a sip from his glass, still eyeing the Vulcan.

"Hope I didn't... come down too hard on you, Spock," he finally mumbled.

The Vulcan met his eyes and spoke seriously. "I'm scared, too, McCoy. Afraid for him... and without him."

The sound of his door buzzer brought Spock back to the present. The Vulcan turned to watch his Captain enter the room.

Kirk was resplendent in a silk shirt of midnight blue over black pants, a silver chain at his throat. His eyes lit up with surprise as he took in the Vulcan's outfit.

"I never saw my Science Officer look like *this* before! Guess I don't have to ask if you're ready for the party."

Spock nodded, trying his best to retain his aloof Vulcan attitude in the face of Kirk's exuberance. "You are looking well, too, this evening, Captain," he intoned.

McCoy burst through the door without buzzing. "Spock, you old softie, leaving that bottle of Saurian brandy on my desk! What a present..." He stopped, stunned speechless by the holiday costumes of his friends. "Humph. Guess I'm going to look like an old man next to you two tonight." He glanced down at his own black evening wear.

"Not at all, Doctor," Spock informed him, stepping to his side. "While your attire is sedate, it is nonetheless quite elegant." He reached out, fingers touching the IDIC pendant that adorned McCoy's outfit.

The doctor looked a bit sheepish. "I thought it was fitting," he said softly, meaningfully.

"I, too," Spock nodded. "And I appreciate your gift, also."

Kirk had watched the by-play between his friends and now stepped closer to them. "What did he give you, Spock?"

"A gift similar to the one I gave him," the Vulcan said, pointing to a bottle on his desk.

Kirk squinted at the label. "Zulth?"

"It has a refreshing, spicy taste," Spock explained. His friends looked doubtful. "It can be consumed either warm or cold," he tried again. "Never mind. If you do not wish to try it, there will be more for me to enjoy."

McCoy laughed. "That's the real Christmas spirit, Spock! Come on, you two. I need a party."

Kirk looked at Spock. "You go ahead, Bones. We'll be there in a moment."

McCoy saw the package in Kirk's hand. "Okay, but don't

be too long. Uhura's leading the caroles again this year." He turned, leaving them as quickly as he had come.

"This year," Kirk said softly, seeing something far in the distance. "Last year, I barely even knew it was Christmas. Marty reminded me. He... led us in prayers that night. I kept thinking of the Enterprise, of home, hanging on to it in my heart."

Spock moved closer to him and Kirk blinked, looking up into the Vulcan's eyes. Spock covered the awkward moment by handing Kirk a tissue-wrapped bundle. For a moment, the Captain just stared at it, then he traded it for the square, gold foil box he'd had in his own hands. "You go first," the human directed.

Spock untied the blue cord on the container and lifted the lid. He looked inside and removed a brightly polished shell. It was colored in opalescent tones, creamy and iridescent. Spock ran his fingers over the contours of the intricately swirled shell, recognizing it immediately.

"I had it mounted and polished," Kirk told him, "after I sneaked it out of your collection."

Spock turned the shell and read the inscription on the stand. *Stardate 7097.12, BANOC 160.* "I remember the day we found it, just beyond the beach house," the Vulcan said, his voice shaking slightly.

"There's something else in there," Kirk nodded toward the gift box.

Spock reached inside again, a curious expression on his face as he produced the second object. "What is it?" he asked.

"Here, shake it," Kirk instructed, taking it from him. He shook the object vigorously and replaced it in Spock's hand.

The Vulcan looked closely. Inside the tiny glass dome was a small, old-fashioned house surrounded by miniature pine trees. Swirls of white flecks tumbled down around the house, brought to life when the globe was shaken.

"Snowstorms," Kirk explained. "Guess that's what I miss most about Christmases I knew as a kid. And I figured you never had snow on Christmas back on Vulcan, even if your mother did force Sarek to let her put up a tree and let you hang up your stocking."

"I never," Spock stated emphatically, "wore stockings."

"But you did have Christmas trees once or twice. You told me so. I remembered that... back on Anthhania, too."

"Thank you for the gifts, Captain," Spock said, letting his eyes reveal the deeper emotions the presents evoked.

"It's not impractical," Kirk went on. The Vulcan looked dubious. Kirk shrugged. "Use it as a paper weight."

"Very well." Spock placed Kirk's gifts next to his bottle of Zulth liquid and nodded to the present in Kirk's hands.

Slowly, the Captain pulled the tissue away from the flat, rectangular shape to reveal a painting. He looked at it, for a moment unable to speak.

"It's beautiful, Spock," he whispered finally.

Spock watched as Kirk's eyes took in every detail of the painting, knowing his Captain understood the significance of the picture. The artist had depicted a craggy mountainside. On the top of one peak, two figures were shown in silhouette. Together, side by side, their shoulders touching, they faced the clouds in the distance. The one word title of the piece was engraved on a gold label on the frame: *"Eternity."*

Kirk closed his eyes, his hands clutching the frame tightly. Spock reached out and took the painting from him, propping it against the viewer on his desk. He turned, meeting the human's gaze.

"Spock, thank you. For everything." Kirk's eyes misted over and he reached out, his hand squeezing the Vulcan's shoulder. "I know it seemed to take forever, but I'm damned glad to be here."

Spock pulled Kirk into the embrace he knew his friend needed. He held the trembling human gratefully a moment and had to force his own memories of last year's Christmas, and all the intervening months, aside. He held Kirk away a moment. "A man like you will always choose the long way home," he said, "but at the risk of repeating a cliché, welcome home, Jim."

"I love clichés," Kirk said happily. "Merry Christmas, Spock."

"Merry Christmas, Captain. Shall we go to the party, now? Our friend the doctor should not be kept waiting."



"WHAT'S THAT, BONES? YOU THINK SPOCK HAS HAD ENOUGH CHRISTMAS CHEER?"

...and to all- a goodnight

